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Goldwin Smith.









## NOTICES OF THE FIRST EDITION.

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"Mr. Miall has succeeded in making a manful and earnest stand against the scepticism of the age in regard to Christianity, without once throughout his volume displaying a temper opposed to the spirit of the religion he advocates—without once imputing to those who do not agree with his arguments, or his conclusions, defective practical morality as the ground of their intellectual difference—without once even hinting that they are guilty of conscious sophisms, of juggling and paltering with the dictates of their consciences, or of stifling the instinctive yearnings of their hearts. No one can peruse the 'Bases of Belief,' without the conviction that the author is a person of calm temper, of just and cultivated intellect, who allows no heat of personal vanity, no desire of personal victory, to mingle with and mar the demonstrative force of his arguments, the contagious influence of his own individual belief of the conclusions to which he strives to bring his readers."—*Spectator*.

"This book has obviously been called forth by the frequent appearance of such works as the 'Phases' and the 'Nemesis of Faith,' which in the author's opinion should not be allowed to have the reading public all to themselves. Following a similar plan, appealing in a like tone to evidence and reason, Mr. Miall, a most fit and able man to speak to the intelligence of young or old, supports in this volume these bases of belief which have been commonly regarded as the essential parts of Christian truth. We do not, of course, take part in the discussion, but we commend heartily the tone that Mr. Miall takes, for it is calm and sensible."—*Examiner*.

"This is a work called forth by the numerous and apparently organized attacks that are now making against the evidences of Christianity. We can safely recommend it to those whose more peculiar office it is to answer the objections of the new race of infidel writers. It is a clear, full, and comprehensive exposition of the grounds on which the evidences of Christianity rest—evidences which have been received and acquiesced in as adequate proofs of the reality of a Divine revelation. Mr. Miall's work may take its place along with 'The Eclipse of Faith,' 'The Restoration of Belief,' and a recent publication of Dr. Wardlaw, on 'Miracles.'"—*Record*.

"Mr. Miall has fully succeeded in opposing a formidable bulwark to that dark torrent of infidelity which of late years has spread so lamentably and so widely over the fair face of Europe."—*New Quarterly Review*.

"We cannot too highly commend the calm, clear, dignified, and candid execution of this book as a whole. It is not a piece of special pleading, but of high, honest, philosophic argument. The Christian cause has reason to congratulate itself on advocates like Henry Rogers, Dr. Wardlaw, Dr. Vaughan, and Edward Miall. Many mists had gathered around the field of argument, and their strong clear breath was required to disperse them."—*Critic*.

"Mr. Miall has presented the age with a work which will still the doubts and allay the questionings of many a cultivated intellect, and many an uneasy mind."—*Weekly News*.

"We invite those who may have been moved by modern insinuations against Christianity to the study of a work which bears on its face such indubitable evidence, not only of mental power, but of intelligence, fair dealing, deliberate conviction, and temperateness, both of argument and spirit; and we sincerely thank the writer for the timely service he has rendered to the majesty of truth, and to the imperishable interests of mankind."—*Eclectic Review*.

"It is popular in manner, but truly scientific in spirit; it so carefully estimates the strain its materials will bear, and erects with such accuracy, and with repeated testings of their validity, the conclusions it is intended to rely upon, that it impresses us as being quite the most conclusive book we ever read on any subject."—*Monthly Christian Spectator*.

*Relig.  
Theol.*

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# BASES OF BELIEF;

AN EXAMINATION OF  
CHRISTIANITY AS A DIVINE REVELATION BY THE LIGHT  
OF RECOGNISED FACTS AND PRINCIPLES.

IN FOUR PARTS.

BY  
EDWARD MIALL.

THIRD EDITION.

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LONDON:  
ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE, AND CO.,  
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1861.



## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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THE following treatise was first published in 1853, and was received with greater favour than the Author had ventured to anticipate. Two library editions having been all but exhausted, a third and cheaper edition is now offered to the public. This step has been taken in consequence, chiefly, of the appearance of the *Essays and Reviews*. It is believed that the main drift of those now celebrated productions is turned aside by the argument maintained in this volume—at any rate, it was originally written with an express view to fortify the reader against speculations, criticisms, and reasonings similar in almost every respect to those put forth in that work. In truth, the Author recognised in them old acquaintances. Notwithstanding their more friendly air, their more reverent bearing, and their substitution of a thoroughly English for a foreign dress, it was impossible to mistake their identity. It would seem that after having been exposed and discredited elsewhere, they have at length found an asylum in the bosom of Oxford University—nor, perhaps, is it matter of wonder that inquiring and honest minds, wearied and offended by the exacting demands made upon them by



High Church authority, should be predisposed to welcome the advent of rationalistic freedom. Whether the eminent men who have had the courage to set the example of shaking hands with this popularly-reputed foe to Christianity really imagined that they were giving it a first introduction to the British public, it would be presumptuous to offer an opinion—but it may be confidently stated that the results which dogmatic philosophy and critical analysis have put before us afresh in the *Essays and Reviews*, were already as familiar to speculative readers in this country as Hume's *Essay on Miracles* used to be about the beginning of the century.

There is no necessity, however, for supposing that these Church of England divines had in view any such purpose as that which undoubtedly animated the school to which the world is indebted for modern rationalistic theology. Whatever may be the tendency of their writings, nothing but an entire absence of charity can attribute to the writers a conscious design of undermining the basis of Divine Revelation, and destroying the very system of truth which it is their special duty to preach and to teach. Great latitude ought to be allowed to the intellectual conclusions of speculative minds as to what constitutes the authority which should govern the Reason in determining what has and what has not come to us as a Revelation from God—and it is much to be regretted that men, earnestly professing that they accept Christianity as a spiritual showing forth of the Divine character and will, should be set down as unbelievers because they repudiate the customary process by which the great majority of their fellows reach the same end. It is surely more just to infer that, in the ardour of an intellec-



tual pursuit, such persons have allowed themselves to be borne away beyond the limits which logically bound their own professions—and that subsequent reflection will convince them that they cannot go so far as they have done on the road on which they have set out, without being compelled to go much farther. It is hardly wise, it cannot be kind, to set up a shout of execration, the only effect of which must be to prevent their retracing their steps to less dangerous paths, and to drive them farther and farther from the conclusions from which we could have wished they had never departed.

But whilst the utmost tenderness and charity are due to the writers who have unitedly set forth their speculations in the *Essays and Reviews*, none whatever can be claimed for the speculations themselves. Their manifest tendency, if not their avowed design, is to eliminate supernaturalism from the Christian faith. It is evident that a historical revelation based on miracles is assumed to be unworthy of God to give, because unfit for man to receive. And this is assumed as a sort of axiom—as a self-demonstrative proposition. At least, no proof of it is attempted. But it seems to underlie the whole collection of these far-famed papers. It constitutes the rampart upon which the artillery of Biblical criticism is mounted. Let this assumption be shown to be unreasonable, and the entire machinery of assault which rests upon it becomes harmless.

That the assumption is unreasonable it is the main object of the following pages to show. How far that object has been attained it is for others to judge. But so far as success has been reached in this respect, so far it supplies an antidote to the erroneous teaching of the *Essays and Reviews*.

Possibly, it does more—for it points out that there is a sphere within which criticism may freely range without loosening the foundations upon which the faith of so large a portion of mankind is based. Let us once for all get rid of the dogma which tyrannises over Reason—namely, that no historical miraculous revelation is worthy of credit—and we may then find a fitting office and suitable functions for honest and fearless Biblical criticism. Much that is given to the world in these *Essays and Reviews* will still remain—but with this difference, that it will remain to enlarge and purify men's notions of Revelation, instead of, as now, to eat into its very substance.

The Author is satisfied that very much of the danger to which Christianity seems to be exposed from the most searching criticism, arises from the prevailing habit of confounding God's Revelation to man by Christ Jesus, with the Record of it which is contained in the Holy Scriptures. Men have gradually come to identify faith in the plenary inspiration of all the books of the Old and New Testaments with faith in Him who declared that "he who has seen ME hath seen the Father." They are more anxious to save the casket than the Pearl of great price which it encloses. The consequence is, that they place the evidence in support of Christianity, as a revelation of God, in a position of serious disadvantage. That Jesus Christ was the Anointed of God—that his mission was to show unto men the Father—and that it was inaugurated, recognised, and authenticated as divine, by "signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost," constitute a position capable of being sustained by consistent and overwhelming proof. But such proof is wholly independent of any

theories we may see reason to maintain as to the kind or degree of inspiration necessary to put men into possession of a true account of that mission, and to give them an accurate and sufficient interpretation of its spiritual significance. The writer, in the progress of his argument, has kept this fundamental distinction constantly before him, and, he presumes to think, with advantage to both questions. He has thereby, as it appears to him, gained a surer basis for faith, while he leaves to legitimate criticism as wide a sphere as reason can demand for it. His justification for doing so, such as it is, will be found in Part IV., of his treatise, under the general title of "The Record."

And now, having strongly repudiated what he understands to be the main purport of the *Essays and Reviews*, which, indeed, it was and is the object of the following pages to frustrate, the Author desires to express his belief that these productions, viewed apart from what is generally taken to be their principal design, lay before the Christian world many thoughts worthy of its calm consideration. Failing, as it is to be earnestly hoped they may fail, of their primary object, they are not ill-adapted to subserve some useful ends. They teach us some lessons needing to be learned. They smite down some idols unworthy of the homage we have paid them. And, above all, they warn us of the necessity of seeking for our faith a broad and deep foundation in admitted facts and universally recognised principles, rather than in traditional and conventional theories which shrink from the rough handling of rigid investigation. In these, and in some other respects, they may yet do some service—though whether such service, rendered in its present shape

comes appropriately from Professors and Divines of the Church of England, may admit of question.

While these sheets have been passing through the press, a formal and authoritative condemnation of the *Essays and Reviews*, signed by the whole bench of Bishops, has been promulgated. What may be its effect, beyond that of vastly increasing the number of the readers of that volume, remains to be seen. It will be found, perhaps, that speculative rationalism is not likely, in the present age of the world, to succumb to Church authority. It is, no doubt, encouraging to be assured that the spirit of scepticism which pervades the condemned volume has not yet taken possession of the minds of those who occupy the highest places in the National Church—but it will be very much more so, to be furnished with evidence that these Right Reverend Fathers in God have power of intellect competent to cast out the spirit which they unanimously denounce. In other words, what is wanted is, not an authoritative condemnation of the book, but a refutation of its errors. This would be a peculiarly appropriate service for the fathers and guides of the Church of England to render to their spiritual children. Some of them, perhaps, are already engaged in the preparation of such a work—in which case, the writer of this volume craves pardon for his presumption in seeming to forestall them by asking public attention to the argument maintained in the present volume. He is not chargeable with the vanity of imagining that his treatise will supersede the necessity of a more specific and detailed reply to the criticisms and reasonings of the *Essays and Reviews*; but, pending the appearance of such a reply, he believes that a calm and searching



examination of the philosophy which constitutes the basis of rationalistic theology will not be without its use in the present controversy. It may prevent many minds from being hurried into premature conclusions. It may convince them that Reason is not necessarily at war with Faith. It may dispose them to wait with some confidence for that fuller light which Episcopal erudition may well be expected to throw upon the question.

Such, at any rate, has been the effect upon the Author's own mind of the line of argument pursued in this volume. He dares not pretend that it has solved every doubt raised by the writers of the *Essays and Reviews*. But it has, at least, prevented any such doubts from unsettling the bases of his belief in Divine Revelation. The varying fortunes, therefore, of Biblical critics in their contests over the text of Scripture, although deeply interesting to him, never shake his convictions. He can await the issue, whatever it may be, without any perturbation of spirit. The facts and principles upon which his faith in Christianity rests, lie too deep to be destroyed by mere scratchings upon the surface. He wishes that this may be the case with others. He thinks that a thoughtful perusal of this volume will tend to make it so. And in this hope, which he prays God, by the aid of his good Spirit, to fulfil, he sends forth this Third Edition of his work, originally prepared to meet precisely the same kind of reasoning which pervades the pages of the *Essays and Reviews*.





## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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IN reading or listening to the objections to Christianity which rest upon purely intellectual grounds, there are probably thousands who, whilst unable to furnish a satisfactory reply, have *felt* the answer and have kept their faith. So, at least, it has been with the Author. It has long appeared to him that belief in the gospel rests ultimately upon deeper, surer, more incontestable principles than will admit of being hacked to pieces by the utmost force of speculative or critical investigation. The present volume is the result of an effort to reduce that into palpable shape which heretofore has been held in solution by most reflective minds—to make visible what very many have felt to be present in them, but still without having assumed any definite form. If he has been successful in this attempt, then the argument which he has elaborated will seem so obvious that every reader will fancy himself familiar with it, and the Writer will have done nothing more than merely put into words, and arrange in logical order, thoughts which all intelligent believers in the Christian revelation will instantly recognise as their own. And this, indeed, has been the sole object of his ambition—to express what is in the mind of nearly every one, but what, until now, has been left unex-

pressed—so that when once enunciated, the propositions, so far from assuming an appearance of novelty, should rather elicit some such response as this, at least from men not yet wholly surrendered to disbelief, “Just so! that is what I always felt, although I have not been able to give distinct utterance to it!”

This is not, in any sense, a book of *Evidences* in support of Christianity, but a book *on Evidences* in relation to the question. The object has been to make out that the proof tendered on behalf of the gospel is of a *kind* which true philosophy is bound to accept. Of late, there has been a manifest disposition to pooh-pooh the labours of former champions of the faith, as if they were utterly beside the mark, now that the human mind has made such wonderful advances in its mode of examining this and similar subjects. Certainly, the tone assumed by modern sceptics has not been that of self-diffidence—and, perhaps, it will be seen that they who are the most forward to take liberties with the name of philosophy, have been least careful to exemplify its spirit. But be this as it may, the Author has appealed from speculative dogmatism, to undeniable facts and universally recognised principles, with a view to establish some Rules of Court, in accordance with which credible testimony should be heard. If he is right, the greater proportion of the evidences which have been arbitrarily rejected, of late, as impertinent, are restored to their former credit—and the conclusion at which we arrive is this, that former lines of argument had become obsolete merely because unsound *criteria* of judgment had been adopted.

Nor is the present volume to be regarded by any as an

exposition of Christian doctrine. The main positions taken up by the Writer, and the phraseology employed, have been chosen *with reference to this controversy*. They represent so much truth as the argument seemed to call for, and no more. But it does not follow that he holds no more. He is not in the habit of concealing his conclusions—nor, where occasion does not call for it, of obtruding his professions. Perhaps, should life, health, and leisure be granted him, he may hereafter, at some time or other, submit to such as may be interested in the subject, what he has been accustomed to regard as the *rationale* of Christian truths—the philosophy of the New Testament doctrines. But this formed no part of his present purpose—and he would not destroy the simplicity of his argument, only to save himself from uncharitable suspicions.

Most of the works in our own language, which take the sceptical side of this controversy, the Author has diligently read—many also on his own side. But having collected his materials, and sketched out his plan, he abstained from looking at publications which have since appeared in defence of Christianity, lest, perchance, he might be diverted from his own line. He knows not, therefore, how far he may have been anticipated by *The Eclipse of Faith*, or by *Dr. Wardlaw on Miracles*. The first part of the *Restoration of Belief* he read with great pleasure, and found in it some coincidence of thought with his own. But, on the whole, he has reason to suppose that the gist of his reasoning is peculiar to the present work, and that he has not incurred much peril of being charged with plagiarism.

If this book shall avail to point out to our intelligent

and free-thinking youth, of either sex, such *Bases of Belief* as may serve to underlie a genuine sympathy for Christ's gospel, and secure their minds from doubts, perplexity, and distress, the Writer's principal object will be answered. He can scarcely hope for more

*Sydenham Park,*

*January 26, 1853.*

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## PART I.

### THE PHENOMENON.

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## THE PHENOMENON.

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### § 1. CHRISTIANITY TO BE TREATED AS A FACT.

RATHER more than eighteen hundred years have gone by since the world became the subject of that religious movement which we call Christianity, the rise, progress, and effects of which constitute the most striking feature of man's history. Considering the breadth of surface it covers in the expanse of human affairs, the immense force with which it has told on the formation of character and the course of events, and the depth to which it has penetrated into the realms of mind, it presents as strong a claim to be treated of as *a fact*, as any of those physical changes which philosophy is busied in investigating. All theories of its origin, therefore, which leave out of account what it has done, and is still doing, and which imply, if they do not assume, that it is an idea rather than a power, must needs be inconclusive and untrustworthy. The deep and sharp-edged footprints of this spiritual revolution with which history abounds cannot be more reasonably overlooked in our speculations regarding its cause and character, than can the entire series of fossilized remains in our conjectures touching the formation of the earth.

### § 2. DESERVING EXPLANATION AS WELL AS CRITICISM.

Reason, then, apart altogether from the religious feelings which may be interested in the subject, requires that the claim of Christianity to be received as a revelation of God, should be tested by a positive as well as negative, a synthetical as well as analytical, method of treatment. Here is a phenomenon of

which neither the reality nor the importance can be denied. It is plainly not enough to cast doubt upon the commonly-received explanation of it. This or that *rationale* may be objected to as untenable—but the phenomenon itself remains. Whence did it spring? In what laws of the human mind did it originate? What are the circumstances which adequately account for its first appearance, its rapid course, its intense action, its early triumph over the seat and centre of civilization, and the permanence of its power down to our own day? Even if criticism were able to make out, as it confidently affirms it can, that the documents upon which we have been accustomed to rely for supplying the answer to these and similar inquiries, are, in the main, worthless, written by we know not whom, at dates which it is impossible now to fix, and crowded with tales which prove nothing more than the ignorance and credulity of the people upon whom they were first palmed off as veritable history—even if scepticism had satisfactorily demonstrated that miracles are incredible, that inspiration is an illusion of the fancy, and that a divine interposition, by means of either, in furtherance of the spiritual well-being of our race, is as unnecessary as it would be absurd—it is yet to be borne in mind that the logical feat would but leave the most marvellous phenomenon in the history of man wholly unexplained. Philosophy should do something more than this if it would show itself worthy of its own name and pretensions. Some effort towards filling up the void which its own destructive process will have made in the world's belief may justly be expected at its hands. Merely to have succeeded in placing the grandest series of facts affecting human destiny in a state of isolation from all assignable causes can hardly be regarded as one of the highest exercises and triumphs of reason.

§ 3. OUR VIEWS OF ITS ORIGIN SHOULD BE AFFECTED BY KNOWLEDGE  
OF ITS PHENOMENA.

All the statements relating to Christianity which history has handed down to our times may be ranged into two divisions—those the substantial accuracy of which it would be sheer folly to impugn—and those respecting which doubt may be, and is,



entertained. To place ourselves in a fair position for passing judgment on the last, it is obviously necessary to take our stand on the first. In other matters of inquiry, reasoning proceeds from the known to the unknown—from what is certain to what is problematical. Adopting this method, a thoughtful man, when pressed with the assertion that such and such things cannot have been, will collect together, as materials for his conclusion, such things pertaining to the subject as must have been, and now are, from which those affirmed to be incredible are required to be rudely broken off. Before he settles down into the belief, for instance, that the power to which Christianity has usually been attributed did not in fact produce it, he will deem himself bound to look at the actual and known phenomena of the case. Because, if he finds that such phenomena can be reasonably ascribed to no other cause—that the one to which they are popularly ascribed is adequate to have produced them, and that between the cause and the effects there is an appearance of congruity—it is obviously proper that he should prosecute his future inquiries in the light of these very significant conditions. They are items which cannot be wisely left out of his calculations. They are “part and parcel” of the problem he desires to solve. “Something has occurred,” such an one may well be expected to consider, “out of which the whole question regarding the origin of Christianity has arisen—and it is important to the accuracy of my final judgment that I should ascertain *in limine* what that something is.”

#### § 4. GENERAL PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER.

Regarding this as the starting-point from which we are most likely to reach a natural conclusion, we propose to set aside for the present, as under attainder, all the historical statements contained in the New Testament objected to by some as being in themselves incredible, and by others as resting upon insufficient evidence. Our present business will be with the facts which will then remain, and which all parties are compelled to receive as indubitable. These facts it will be convenient to

put together in as concise and connected a form as we are able, and regard them as constituting a phenomenon in the history of mankind which cannot be reasonably ignored in any investigation of the divine claims of Christianity.

#### § 5. BRIEF MINISTRY OF JESUS.

From seventy to eighty years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, one Jesus, a Jew, appeared to his fellow-countrymen, as a religious reformer. The period of his public labours was brief, for while yet young, he was executed as a malefactor. The purity of his life is unquestionable, and his extraordinary insight into spiritual truth is sufficiently attested by such fragments of his discourses as have been preserved to us in the writings of his followers. The topics on which he was wont to dwell in his addresses to his disciples and the Jewish people presented no attraction to their grosser appetites and passions, no point of fascination to their national or intellectual pride. God, the Creator and Father of all—man, fallen and depraved, but not forsaken—sin, a real and terrible evil—himself, the expected Christ, a mediator and reconciler—a new heart of faith, hope, and love—a life of self-renunciation and holiness—a simple worship of prayer and praise—a general resurrection from the dead—a final judgment—an everlasting state of recompense, “according to the deeds done in the body”—such were the spiritual truths which he wielded. These he proclaimed with untiring zeal, and recommended, no doubt, by a life eminently consistent with them. But his personal success does not appear to have been very remarkable, for it is certain that at his death he left behind him but a few hundred disciples.

#### § 6. FOLLOWED BY AN EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION.

The life, labours, and death, however, of this Jew, was the beginning of a religious movement which extended itself, with unexampled rapidity, over the civilized world, and which continues to be felt down to the present hour. To some of the more prominent features of this spiritual revolution, we shall do well to direct cursory attention, inasmuch as they will

require to be borne in mind when we proceed to examine the pretensions of Christianity as a revelation of God.

§ 7. COMMENCING WITH THE JEWS.

It commenced among the Jews, whose general state at that period was anything but that of quick susceptibility to lofty religious views, or to pure and catholic principles of faith. It is true, that a tolerably familiar acquaintance with the writings of their own prophets, diffused by the stated and frequent reading of the sacred book in every synagogue, had awakened a popular expectation that the Messiah was at hand—but the Messiah looked for was one whose office and work, whose career and triumph, were to be political rather than religious, and adapted to gratify the pride of an unsocial and exclusive nation, rather than to draw individual souls into communion with God. The bulk of the common people in Palestine bowed to the authority, and submitted to the teaching, of the religious school called Pharisees, whose fervour was intense hatred of foreign domination, whose faith clung to oral traditions, and whose worship was a wearisome round of lifeless ritualism. Under their influence conscience was at once oppressed and benumbed by multitudinous manipulations, and spiritual pride maintained itself unruffled in association with gross immorality of life. Sadduceeism, never greatly in favour with the vulgar, but occupying many of the high places of society, extinguished in its adherents all spiritual tendencies. It was negative, critical, unbelieving, captious, scornful. Starting with the highest religious pretensions, it had gradually cooled into a mere *residuum* of hard and unfeeling utilitarianism. It limited the sphere of human duty and destiny to the present life. It entertained notions of God's providential government which dried up the very sources of the social sympathies. And, behind a veil of submission to the authority of Moses, it concealed, or thought to conceal, a system of unmitigated selfishness, rough-hewn into a philosophy. The Essenes, a small sect of mystics, austere in their lives, monastic in their habits, and contemplative in their devotions, exerted no perceptible reforming influence upon the broad mass of the Jewish people.

The existence of this body was a protest against the religious indifference of the times—and its isolation proves that society was in no haste to welcome a purer or more elevated embodiment of religious sentiment than that which constituted the orthodoxy of the day. Ought this to excite our wonder? On the contrary, is it not precisely what we might have anticipated? Where the faith of a people seldom or never glances above a temporal end, where their morals are debased and vicious, and where their minds are rude and uncultivated, it requires the force of a predetermined purpose, rather than the exercise of a discriminating reason, to discover in them a genial soil for the germination and growth of a highly-spiritualized religious system. Of all people under the sun, the Jews were about the least likely to hail a deliverance from their prejudices and superstitions. A feeling of nationality twined itself about their theological belief, and any innovation upon their religion would be regarded as an assault upon their position as the favourite people of Heaven. They hugged their exclusiveness with a passionate tenacity of embrace. They took their rank among the nations of the earth as a sacred caste—and to the teaching which put Jew and Gentile upon an equal footing in the sight of God, they were much more likely to listen with loathing than with sympathy. Galilee, moreover, the place of residence, and the chief scene of labour, occupied by Jesus, was looked down upon by the Jews in general as a province hopelessly incapable of producing any great or good thing, and the association of its name and reputation with the faith taught by him, could have lent it no adventitious recommendation to their regard. Nevertheless, the extraordinary religious impulse which followed immediately upon the death of this spiritual teacher, took its rise in precisely this quarter, and suddenly spread itself among this ungenial and untoward people. Here was its infancy nurtured. In this unlikely region, pure and sublime ideas of God, noble principles of human duty, simplicity and spirituality of worship, and bright hopes of a happy immortality, made their appearance, and kindled a fire in the heart of humanity which still continues to burn.



## § 8. SPREADING ITSELF AMONG THE GENTILES.

But the impulse was not limited to the country in which it originated. As the thunder-cloud moves in a direction seemingly contrary to the wind, so the Christian faith sped onwards in the very teeth of influences best calculated to obstruct it. The single fact that Judea was its birthplace would go far to neutralize whatever contagious power it might else have exerted over the polished Greek and the haughty Roman. The Gentile world repaid with liberal interest the contempt with which it was held by the Jewish people—and not even in our own day would any novelty of doctrine originating among their now scattered descendants encounter stronger or more inveterate antipathies than were opposed to the reception of Christianity from so despised a quarter, in the age of Tiberius and Nero. This, however, was not the only, nor the greatest barrier to the progress of the new movement in the Roman Empire. The general condition of society, both polite and rude, cultivated and uncultivated, was such as to render its extensive success to the last degree improbable. The intellect of the times was in close and unblushing association with the grossest immorality. Developed to a high degree in the entire absence of all that was adapted to awaken and nourish the spiritual nature, it became rather an instrument of the passions than a purifier of the heart. It resembled Prince Hal amongst his boon companions at the Boar's Head, Eastcheap, rather than Henry the Fifth conducting with vigour the government of his kingdom. It was, therefore, for the most part, devoid of insight into any of the more elevated regions of thought, and was more apt to analyse than to feel. It had already torn to shreds, by its acute and laborious criticism, the mythology which it had received from past ages—and proud of its freedom, it was ill-disposed to take upon itself a new and much more stringent yoke. Philosophy, confident in its own resources, desired no revelation of the Divine will. It might be politic to patronise religion as a convenient restriction upon the turbulent passions of the vulgar, but what sage of those times ever dreamt of making



it the rule of his private life? The dogmatic tone of Christianity, its exclusive pretensions, and its apparently humble origin, would be far more likely to shock the pride and prejudices of the educated than would its moral purity and sublime spirituality to elicit admiration or beget attachment.

But if all reasonable expectation would have pronounced against the chances of any extensive triumph of the Gospel over the cultivated portion of society, it might have concluded still more decisively against its success among the common people. Here the difficulties to be overcome were stupendous. A sensuous superstition indulgent to, and even provocative of, the lowest appetites of animal nature, overspread "the masses" like a foul leprosy, canonized warlike aspirations as the highest virtue, lent its sanction to some of the most loathsome crimes, gratified the senses by a series of gorgeous rites and festivals, and yoked conscience to pleasures, pursuits, and expectations, in all of which precedence was given to the inferior over the superior elements of our common nature. What plastic power was likely to be exerted by high spiritual truths upon a people whose public religious solemnities were drunken and licentious orgies, whose sports were barbarous and cruel, and whose highest conception of virtue was courage? Granting that there is a religious sense in man, even in his profoundest depths of abasement, which, when awakened, can recognise divinity in some of its simplest and purest manifestations, it is not less certain that, ordinarily, something more is requisite to its recovery from habitual torpor, than the light emanating from the truth itself. As there are intellectual glories which cannot be discerned by the mind's eye of the uncultured, so are there spiritual influences and forces which, however powerful in their own nature, cannot penetrate the conscience and the heart until they have been laid bare by some other agency. We are accustomed, in regard to other matters, to look upon some degree of natural or acquired susceptibility, as necessary to the action of external objects upon the mind—and where this susceptibility has been impaired by antecedent associations and habits, we are wont to anticipate a proportionately diminished result. In relation,

however, to the progress of the religious movement now under notice, at least so far as the Gentile nations are concerned, the facts of the case do not respond to the anticipation. On the one hand we have a highly spiritual instrument—on the other, materials as gross and unsensitive as animal indulgence and a debasing superstition could make them. But, notwithstanding the apparent want of congruity between the nature of the force at work, and the material upon which it operated, the effect produced was absolutely astounding. Not the ideas, merely, enshrined in the Christian faith, but the feelings it seeks to inspire, the character it aims to mould, and the course of life to which it prompts, became, in a very short time, prevalent enough to be appealed to with some confidence as proof that the religion was from God.

#### § 9. AFFECTING THE ENTIRE CHARACTER OF ITS CONVERTS.

A close and candid study of the history of the first three centuries of the Christian era, will suffice to convince every impartial mind that the religious movement which developed itself during that period was no superficial thing. It was not a mere change of opinions, which left untouched the main springs of conduct. The new faith grasped the very will of humanity, and controlled it as with the hand of a god. It was not only light in the intellect—it was fire in the heart. It reversed the most natural, the most powerful, the most permanent motives which sway men's actions. It tore up deeply-rooted habits. It bore down the fondest and most inveterate prejudices. It brought into subjection to itself every appetite, desire, affection, ambition, by which man is wont to be governed. In the apostolic writings, several of which are indisputably genuine, it is impossible not to discern abundant proof that the whole being of those whose thoughts they reflect was imbued with, and assimilated to, the truths they proclaimed. It is not merely that they held life cheap in comparison of their spiritual convictions, and the responsibilities they believed to arise out of them—there are far more delicate and incidental traces in their letters that the gospel had penetrated to the innermost centre of their being. One sees in

them a calm sobriety of purpose, an air of masculine common sense, a keen appreciation of human relationships, a masterly application of means to ends, and a perpetual spirit of self-vigilance, quite incompatible with the notion that the impulse which stirred them had touched their passions only. These men, whatever else they may have been, were no fanatics. Their very enthusiasm is without flame. Their very madness has method in it. They do not rave. They are not given to superlatives. They can counsel wisely even in regard to little things. Reason still governs them—if mistaken, yet reason still. Whatever, therefore, may be our conclusion as to the character of their faith, there can be little question as to the extent of its influence. It possessed the entire man—it held under it, not his imagination only, nor his affections, but his judgment. And, more or less, this characteristic of the religious revolution of the age, displays itself in multitudinous instances. Just when its vitality is most abundant, does it throw off as unsuited to it the common tendencies of fanaticism. When most intense, it is most practical. The extravagances which subsequently passed for the highest forms of Christian duty, found little encouragement in the earliest and most active age of the Church. On the contrary, the spirit born of the new faith, laid vigorous siege to real evils, and busied itself in planning and carrying into effect substantial good. It set its face against the sentiments, practices, and habits which degrade and debase human nature—formality, will-worship, and bodily service—falsehood, revenge, licentiousness, intemperance, covetousness, pride. It enforced industry upon all. It turned away, horror-stricken or loathing, from public sports, which served but to brutalize spectators. It organized benevolence—made provision for the poor—befriended the wretched—hastened to the relief of the suffering—bethought itself of the captive, the unfortunate, the shipwrecked. What it did, moreover, in these matters, it did on system—its charity was rather a purpose than an impulse. It economized the application of its sympathies. For a considerable period at least, its external embodiments had upon them the stamp of manliness—the appearance of a strong business instinct. Where such

indications as these are found associated with a zeal which could readily renounce all earthly prospects, and cheerfully embrace death in any guise, even the most terrific, in preference to any compromise which might be interpreted into a renunciation of the faith, there is full evidence that the change to which such effects are attributable must have been deep, radical, entire. The whole man must have been affected to admit of any such manifestation as this. Such, however, was the sort of revolution which after the death of Jesus, and as the effect of proclaiming his doctrines, passed from end to end of the Roman empire with marvellous rapidity.

§ 10. PROMOTED BY THE SIMPLEST AND APPARENTLY MOST  
UNLIKELY MEANS.

Setting aside all those causes which may be fairly characterised as supernatural, the means resorted to by the early promoters of this spiritual movement appear strikingly inadequate. They to whose labours the planting of the first Christian churches is attributed possessed no adventitious advantages. Poverty, obscurity, illiteracy, would do nothing to enhance their persuasiveness. Had they stumbled upon some political purpose captivating to the fancy of men in any age, and interwoven it with the truths they proclaimed as from heaven—had they adapted their teaching to a prevailing foible of the times or of the race—had they encouraged expectations of immediate social amelioration, or worldly ease—in a word, had they presented any one of those flattering baits at which human nature is prone to snap with heedless avidity—their success, although extraordinary, would not have been wholly inexplicable. Or if, like Mahomet, they had relied upon rougher appliances, and had conquered a place for their religious system in the esteem of men by dint of the sword—while we might have wondered at their good fortune we should not have been entirely at a loss to account for it. But the first followers of Jesus did nothing of the sort. They pursued a course as opposite to all these suppositions as can well be conceived. What strong passion of human nature does their system tempt or gratify? What promise did it hold out in the



apostolic day of earthly reward? For three hundred years it kept itself aloof from all political associations—and it denounced all methods of advancing its claims which were not strictly moral as opposed to physical—honest as opposed to crafty—true as opposed to fictitious. “The foolishness of preaching” is the only force to which scepticism can point as having been employed to bring about this marvellous revolution. Certain men, having nothing extraordinary in themselves, apart from the supernatural, uttered certain truths—and a great part of the civilized world was thereby “turned upside down.” The main purport of those truths we know—we can form a shrewd estimate of the general qualifications of the men who persisted in speaking them—and we are warranted in affirming that the power they wielded when measured by the effects they produced, is without a parallel in the history of mankind. That other faiths have taken hold upon as large a number of the human race—or have spread with something like the same rapidity, is not denied—but neither the extent nor the rapidity of the success of Christianity constitutes by itself the singularity of the case. That which is unique about it is, that without anything in the nature of the truths proclaimed, or in the means resorted to for enforcing them upon acceptance, which suggests a reasonable explanation of the triumph, that triumph, nevertheless, was so speedy, so wide, so lasting.

#### § 11. PERMANENT IN ITS RESULTS.

It is worth observation, moreover, that the grand spiritual revolution now under review, was no transient one. Unlike any of those startling and brilliant phenomena which have occasionally shot athwart the expanse of human affairs, attracting universal, but brief attention, and baffling all inquiries into their origin, but passing away like a meteor without leaving any perceptible traces of their action, Christianity abides to this day. It is still a force the energy of which no one observant of facts will presume to dispute. Eighteen centuries and upwards, comprising more than fifty generations, have glided past, but the impulse set in motion by an obscure Jew,



in the remote and despised province of Galilee, has not yet spent its strength. It excites scarcely less attention now than when, in the freshness of its might, it laid the old mythology of Rome prostrate in the dust. Over a broad extent of the earth's surface, men continue to exhibit no slight interest in it and its anticipated triumphs. Many and keen are the controversies still waged concerning its truths and institutions. Even now, after so long a time, a vast proportion of the literature of the age has a direct relation to it in some one or other of its aspects. The discussion rife at this moment as to its divine origin serves to remind one that neither learning, nor criticism, nor philosophy, have been able hitherto effectually to silence its pretensions, or satisfy the common sense of mankind that they are fallacious.

And this permanence of Christianity is the more remarkable when considered in the light of two or three qualifying facts. Never, perhaps, has a religious system been so put to the proof as this, by the misapprehensions, the follies, and the crimes of its own disciples. Let any one study it in its authentic documents, or familiarise himself with the earlier illustrations of its spirit in the lives of its first teachers and converts, and candour will oblige him to admit that its entire aim and scope were gradually lost sight of by its adherents, and that it became ultimately perverted to ends which its own principles and precepts strongly repudiated. Its simplicity was overlaid—its spirituality merged. Heathenism was grafted upon the stock of the Gospel. It was made to subserve the vilest purposes of king-craft. It was degraded into an accomplice of the most atrocious monsters that ever figured on the stage of history. Hardly a villany can be mentioned which has not been canonised in its name. The world has groaned under the weight of sufferings inflicted upon it ostensibly in its own behalf. It has been too generally exhibited by those who professed to be vested with its authority, and to dispense its blessings, as giving its sanction to propositions which reason rejects, to institutions which experience has proved to be incurably pernicious, and to conduct which all the moral instincts of our nature abhor. And yet, singularly enough, it

never became extinct. Underneath a putrefying mass of human absurdities and corruptions, it still lived. Nothing could smother it. Every now and then, through the darkest ages, it would show itself here and there in its primitive purity and power. All along it was garnered up by a few faithful souls as the seed of a mighty change—was preserved as the handful of leaven destined to purify society of its moral feculence. Long might the hopes it inspired have seemed to be illusory—but a day of resuscitation came at last. The Reformation burst forth. That self-same spiritual impulse, which fifteen hundred years before had traversed the Roman empire like an electric current, and which a millennium of perversity and crime could not wholly stay, once more displayed its amazing energy in throwing off the accumulated corruptions which men, whether ignorantly or by design, had heaped upon it. The same truths first propounded by the carpenter's son in Judea, enshrined in the same writings wherein his apostles originally developed and enforced them, exerted, now as then, the same talismanic power over the human mind. True! the extraordinary fervour of that period has since subsided, and again the doctrine of Christ has been overgrown with weeds of rankest quality. Even to this day Christianity is exposed to grave imputations by the ambitious, selfish, corrupt and tyrannical maxims and practices of its professed exponents and subjects. So that all along, it has suffered a disadvantage from the conduct of its ostensible friends, great in proportion to its own catholicity, purity, and spirituality. It has seldom had an external embodiment worthy of itself. Its soiled vesture has never done much to set off its moral beauty, but very much to conceal and to defile it. All this has to be taken into account in connection with the enduring quality of the Christian faith. It is remarkable that, regarded as a religious system, it has not sunk under the load of follies and atrocities with which its own disciples have burdened its name and reputation—more remarkable by far that it should have lived through the stifling atmosphere of ecclesiastical imposture, than that it should have survived the fiery baptism of persecution. It has done both.

§ 12. WIELDING ITS INFLUENCE MOST SUCCESSFULLY WHERE INTELLIGENCE IS MOST DEVELOPED.

There is another consideration deserving of notice in connexion with the continuity of this spiritual movement—Its greatest successes have been achieved over those races of men which are most distinguished by the activity of their intellect, and at those epochs in the world's history when mind has been most awake. We are told, indeed, that there is nothing singular in the phenomenon which the permanence of Christianity presents—and are referred for parallels to Brahminism, Buddhism, and Mohamedanism, the two former of which can boast of a much longer period of existence than that of the religious system founded by Christ. But the remark is obvious and just that in the countries over which the aforementioned forms of superstition and error have prevailed, *everything* remains unchanged, as well as the religious faith of the people. Their political institutions, their social habits, their customs, their very fashions, are as inflexible as their creed. All are stereotyped, and are handed down from generation to generation, without the alteration of a single feature. This general characteristic of Oriental nations renders any comparison between the longevity of their religious systems and that of Christianity extremely inconclusive. The cases present no point of analogy but the single one of lengthened duration. Now that is not a feature in the history of the religion of Jesus, upon which, taken apart, any stress of argument is made to rest. The simple fact that it has remained until now is not so remarkable, as that it should have remained under the circumstances to which we are about to refer. At starting, the most rapid and triumphant course of Christianity was westward. Wherever civilisation was most advanced, it made most way. Wherever the intellect of man was most busy, most prying, and, it may be added, most practical in its exercises, there this spiritual revolution obtained its most potent sway. At the present moment, its governing influence is chiefly exerted upon the Anglo-Saxon family, whose mental activity and restless energy are leaving their marks upon the surface of well-nigh every country under

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heaven. One may note something more curious even than this. Those nations which most reverently cherish Christianity as a *faith*, and are least disposed to treat it as a *speculation*—which have been most ready to yield to it as a power, rather than receive it as a cold abstraction—are also those nations specially distinguished by their disposition and aptitude for turning their conceptions into acts. It is not among theorists and dreamers that the gospel met with its most ready reception, or developed its highest spiritual vitality. The chief seats of its power have been with men of action, whose intellects have become sinewy from constant and healthful exercise. Quite akin to the foregoing facts is the further one, that those epochs which have been most remarkable for the successes of the Christian system, have also been those in which mind has been most actively in motion. Take the first two centuries of our era, or that which includes the Reformation, or that which has elapsed since the labours of Whitefield and Wesley, and it will be difficult to select another interval of equal duration in which the power, the activity, the freedom, or the daring of human intellect have been so conspicuously displayed. Other religions may flourish best when mind is most stagnant. Not so this, at least if we are to credit the general tenor of its history. When the thoughts of men have been most astir, it has most successfully asserted its mastery over them. It matters little how we explain this—whether we conclude intellectual activity to have usually sprung out of, or conduced to, the progress of Christianity. In either case, attention is challenged to the fact that its perpetuity has been maintained under conditions wholly dissimilar from those which have characterised the continuance of the Oriental systems just now alluded to. The *vis inertiae* and the *vis vitæ* cannot be fairly treated as if they were the same.

### § 13. SUSTAINING HOSTILE INVESTIGATION.

It should be borne in mind, further, that the religious movement under consideration has been subjected at intervals, throughout its progress, to severe and hostile investigations. The historical facts to which its origin has been usually

referred have been sifted with extraordinary care and skill. The representations of God and man, and of their relationship the one to the other, on which it has proceeded, have been discussed, contested, and maintained by the most vigorous and best cultivated minds. Nothing pertaining to its high and exclusive pretensions has been allowed to pass muster unopposed. Criticism has let fly its shafts at every joint of its harness. Philosophy has sat in judgment on it, and has not only pronounced its decisions, but has sustained them also by elaborate statements of its reasons. Shrewd common sense has made its observations on it. Wit has mercilessly fastened upon its supposed defects. Now this is not the proper time nor place for saying whether or not Christianity has borne the ordeal unscathed. The remark suffices for the present, that it has won its way to the position it holds in the face of an intellectual opposition powerful enough, one may fairly conclude, to have crushed any fallacy of superstition, however tenaciously held. It will scarcely be alleged that the Christian faith has yet been put *hors de combat* by its assailants, even on the intellectual heights of society. If great minds have rejected its claims after due examination, minds equally great have admitted and affirmed them. It is not, therefore, owing to the low mental stature of its adherents that it still continues to govern them. Its sway is not limited to the uninquiring, nor are its triumphs achieved over the undisciplined only. Even at this moment, repeated and powerful as are the attacks directed against it, it has not been dislodged from its supremacy over high intelligence. The very philosophy which scorns its authority adopts many of its truths, and searches for the origin of them in the constitution and laws of human nature. The stern logic which remorselessly hews down its facts, is not uncommonly attended by a more genial and sympathizing reason which spares and cherishes and rejoices in the spiritual conclusions which those facts are held to symbolize. Most of those who, in our day, cause the body of Christ's gospel "to pass through the fire," claim kinship with its spirit. They repudiate it in its external process—they admire it in its internal results. It wrings even from them a



testimony to its high character—and as hypocrisy is regarded as an involuntary homage done to truth, so modern scepticism may be cited as honouring Christianity in the very act of renouncing it.

§ 14. OPERATING IN OUR OWN TIMES AS AN UNPARALLELED MORAL POWER.

There yet remains, however, a large class of results in daily progress amongst us, a bare enumeration of which will bring out in still stronger relief the peculiarity of the religious phenomenon demanding to be accounted for. It is admitted, indeed, that no spiritual system which either in the process of its formation, or in its mature expression, fails to satisfy the honest requirements of reason, can fairly pretend to divine authority—but it ought not to be forgotten that religion, if it have any meaning at all, makes its appeal, not exclusively to the intellect, but to the entire man. It is consequently to be looked at, not merely as it may answer the searching inquiries of the understanding, but also in its power over the character, and in its capacity of yielding happiness. It is insufficient and unfair to apply to Christianity those tests only which come under the cognisance of the purely mental faculties, and to investigate its pretensions as if it were but a bundle of propositions upon which argument is to be heard for and against. If we would qualify ourselves for judging it aright, we should acquire some reliable knowledge not only of what it has *done*, but of what it is *now doing*. Its success or failure as a moral agency will throw more light upon its origin and claims, than its ability or inability to resist the disintegrating force of logic—inasmuch as its primary purpose is moral, and, in all questions relating to the discharge of its functions in this regard, a right of appeal lies from the subordinate court of logic, to the supreme court of reason.

§ 15. WITNESS ITS INSTITUTIONS.

What, then, are the more obvious proofs of the continued action and power of the religious movement commenced by Jesus of Nazareth, furnished by the characteristic condition of

modern times? The first grand peculiarity presenting itself for notice is the simple but vast apparatus which it has erected, and which it systematically keeps in motion, for inculcating spiritual truths, for exciting and exercising spiritual affections, and for implanting and nourishing in the hearts of men a sense of spiritual duties. The one day in seven consecrated to physical rest—the institutions which collect men together on that day for worship and instruction—and the appointments which are so well adapted to stir human thought and emotion in reference to the purest, and highest, and worthiest objects of life and effort—may surely be regarded as emphatically distinctive of the faith attributable to the sacred Scriptures. Now, let this matter be looked at considerably, and prejudice apart. To what a Jew said and did, in Palestine, above eighteen hundred years ago, we owe the fact that a very considerable portion of the human family are summoned weekly from the business and cares of the body, to converse with things directly pertaining to God. Make every abatement you may think reasonable from the worth of the actual results produced by this arrangement as at present worked—urge what you will in proof of its inefficiency, its feebleness, its abuse to narrow, and, sometimes, pernicious ends—still there will remain this broad fact, as a living and thriving offspring of Christianity—that wherever it prevails, wherever it is not thoroughly overlaid by priestcraft, and buried beneath corruptions, a direct and systematic appeal is made on one day in every week to the superior, may we not add, the diviner elements of man's nature? It may chance that the appeal is terribly mismanaged. It may be true that the response elicited by it is very far indeed from reaching our ideal of what it might be, and what it should be. It may even be contended by many, not without some support from facts, that it is losing much of its original force, and will, in the course of a few more generations, become obsolete. But assuredly, it deserves mention among the still visible results of the spiritual revolution originated by Jesus Christ, that institutions are maintained in countless numbers for periodical action upon men's minds and consciences—and that millions are every week brought into contact, more or less

intimate, with truths and teachings more or less elevating, purifying, and ennobling. What may have been the indirect influence of this upon social progress it is impossible to calculate. But a sober judgment, we think, would regard that estimate which ignores or makes light of it as the least worthy of implicit reliance. That in those countries where the day of rest, and the institution of public worship and religious teaching are most conscientiously attended to, little or nothing of what is prevalent among them of veneration for the Supreme, of the obedience which is due to truth, of the claims upon their regard of something more worthy of their nature than pursuits which ever allure but never satisfy them, of kindly consideration for the well-being of others—that nothing of all this is due to these peculiarly Christian agencies, is a conclusion so remote from common likelihood as to indicate that it has not been reached by the spontaneous exercise of the mental faculties, but that the mind has been driven upon it by the force of some violent prejudice. Bold and bald assertions, contradictory of all the knowledge we possess of cause and effect, are not stamped by true philosophy as more trustworthy when levelled against, than for, the pretensions of Christianity. That cannot be fairly treated as an extravagant assumption which, seeing the existence and systematic activity of a vast apparatus of means adapted to evoke spiritual thought, and to give exercise to spiritual sympathies, ascribes much of the religious life which manifests itself in the presence of these means to their operation. We feel ourselves fully warranted, therefore, in putting the case thus. To the impulse originated by one Jesus, nearly two thousand years ago, we are indebted for a system of agencies by which, in our own day, and among the most active, intelligent, and enterprising races of man, thoughts of God and of his moral government, and affections in some measure correspondent therewith, are stirred up, and kept alive. Wherever these agencies are found, there also we find humanity elevated to a somewhat higher moral and religious state than elsewhere—more generally conscious of a spiritual nature, of its relationship to the Father of spirits, and of the capabilities and responsibilities which both involve. No



philosophical investigation of the phenomenon presented by Christianity will leave this feature of it entirely out of account.

§ 16. ITS REFORMATORY AND PURIFYING EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER.

This, however, is not all which Christianity, in its purer forms, is doing to mould society in the present day. Its power is felt in many ways. In myriads of instances its truths are restoring conscience to its proper supremacy, reforming vicious habits, holding in check evil passions, and quickening, nourishing, and maturing benevolent impulses. Can this be disputed? Be it fanaticism, or credulity, or whatever else the sceptic may think fit to designate it, a power does actually develop itself in our midst, strong enough, in numberless cases, to give a new direction to men's thoughts and desires, and to impress their characters with a new "image and superscription." If much which exhibits this appearance of change is spurious, evanescent, or hypocritical, no one conversant with facts will deny that there yet remains much also that is real, and permanent. Men are, even now, brought to a stand in headlong courses of passionate pursuit and enjoyment, by the simple but energetic influence of the gospel story upon their hearts. They are, down to this day, wrought upon by that narrative, and the popular interpretation of it, to achieve a self-conquest, even in the most unlikely circumstances, and displaying moral heroism in its highest forms—to renounce the most seductive enticements—to break off the most cherished friendships—to rise above natural affections—to extinguish seemingly implacable resentments—to face manfully the hardest trials—to submit unrepiningly to the bitterest mortifications—to endure with fortitude and cheerfulness the heaviest afflictions—and to trample in the dust the loftiest pride. The name of Christ has talismanic power over them, and faith in him, and love to him, do, not merely as a matter of theory, but as a matter of fact, give them a victory over themselves, and the world. And wherever this is the case—wherever this faith and this love become triumphant in the heart, there the man is the better for it—

better in all the relationships of life—as father, husband, brother, son, subject, master or servant—better in all the mental and moral sympathies and activities which connect him with another life, as a thinking, as a responsible, as a self-governing, as an aspiring being. Proofs of this, if honestly sought for in individual histories, will be discovered in abundance. He who has never met with specimens, is simply ignorant of their existence and variety because he will not be at the pains to inquire into what is passing around him. It is one of the aspects of the great problem to be solved, the least likely to come under the notice of German professors, and French philosophers; nor has it received from the intellectual sceptics of our own country the measure of attention which it undoubtedly merits. Perhaps it is quite as much owing to the fact that few persons in middle-class life in England and the United States of America are not cognisant of several of these cases of moral transformation, that they are slow to yield up their faith in Christianity at the demand of keen logicians, as it is to the educational and social prejudices to which their doggedness of belief is commonly ascribed. The instances are far too numerous, far too striking, and far too frequently occurring to be annihilated by a *dictum* of positive philosophy, and it would be much easier at the present moment to persuade men that mesmerism and electro-biology have never exerted any influence upon the physical system of human beings, than to convince them that Christianity is devoid of an alterative and highly purifying spiritual power.

§ 17. THE CONSOLATION AND HAPPINESS IT STILL IMPARTS.

And whilst this gospel of Christ manifests down to the present day a wondrous power to arrest evil passions in the name of conscience, and to raise, refine, and dignify the character, as proved and illustrated in numbers of instances defying calculation, so it has exhibited, and continues to exhibit, a competency to bless those who believe in it. We say nothing now about the worth of this fact in such an inquiry as the present—but that it *is* a fact cannot fairly be disputed. It may, indeed, be alleged with truth that a great majority of those



who profess the Christian faith derive from it, so far as may be judged of in their conduct, no great amount of enjoyment—but it is equally certain that where the whole soul is yielded up to its influence, it has proved itself a perennial and unfailing source of comfort, peace, and happiness. In every age, from the very commencement of its career, and now, in every country in which its leading doctrines are known, it has been, and is, as healing balm to the wounded conscience. Poverty has forgotten its privations in the sunshine of its benignity, and has rejoiced as in the possession of boundless wealth. To the listless, weary, worn-out devotee of pleasure, it has given a renovated and much more glorious consciousness of life. It has lapped the desponding in a “peace that passeth understanding.” Through years of sickness it has been as a sympathising and cheerful companion, suggesting thoughts all radiant of hope, soothing irritation, charming petulance into submissiveness, and awakening, and keeping alive, even to the last, that feeling which protracted disease and confinement tend so powerfully to extinguish—an unselfish interest in the welfare of others. Where death has been, and with rude hand has rent asunder tenderest ties, how often has it come like a ministering angel to the mourner, beguiling sorrow of its tears, binding up broken hearts, and whispering, in gentlest accents, to the bereaved, a conviction that all is well. In the hour of sudden peril it has imparted calm assurance, and has helped the timid and the constitutionally feeble to look destruction in the face undismayed. And in the chamber of death, when “heart and flesh fail,” and the departing spirit has bidden its last farewell to the things of time, has it not been to the dying as a visitant from the higher realms, come purposely to light the way-worn traveller through the dark passage of the grave to his everlasting home? No poetry in the description of these things can approach the poetry of the things themselves. And they are to be met with everywhere, and in no scanty variety, by those who care to look for them. Everywhere some few children of Adam may be discovered who have realized in Christianity its most flattering promises, and who, if questioned as to its power to bless, would reply by calling up their per-

sonal experience with glowing and tearful gratitude. All this may be the effect of honest delusion—that is not now the question before us. Howsoever produced, it is itself a notable reality—a feature of the phenomenon not to be overlooked—that much, very much, of the higher and more valuable satisfaction enjoyed in this world, even in the present day, is directly to be traced to what was said, and done, and borne, by Jesus of Nazareth.

§ 18. ITS GENIAL AND HUMANIZING INFLUENCE UPON THE SPIRIT  
OF THE AGE.

There is yet another view of the subject deserving consideration. There are some characteristics of modern civilization, especially in those countries in which it is most advanced, which are generally regarded, not without reason, as placing it high above that of ancient times with which history has made us acquainted. Generally speaking, they are all tints of one colour—various developments of the same germinal principle—namely, good-will. One cannot but be sensible of a certain hardness and want of benevolent feeling in the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. It presents to our view a highly polished surface, but to the touch of the kindlier sympathies of our nature it is cold. Like a face in which all the features are comely and exquisitely chiselled, but which has a repulsive expression, or, at least, a lack of geniality, so, it will probably have struck most that there pervades the social and public life of classic antiquity, admirably graceful as are the better specimens of its manners, a sad want of moral warmth—of that which indicates a play of the affections around the broader subjects of human interest. It is not that these subjects are overlooked—for they are very frequently discussed, and are occasionally treated of, with marvellous intellectual power—but it is that they are seldom or never taken up as matters of present practical importance. Search where you will, you will discover no individual exemplification of active, self-sacrificing philanthropy of a similar type to that of our own Howard—no public movement for obtaining justice to the oppressed, or ministering help to the helpless and the outcast, resembling that which,

within our own memory, abolished first the slave-trade, and subsequently slavery itself. Intellect did not busy itself with schemes for the amelioration of human wretchedness; and but little was done, or even proposed, for the well-being and elevation of what we now call "the masses." In a word, ancient civilization exhibits little benevolence. It wants tenderness. It shows none of the healthier moral sensibilities. It is not humane—nor can it be pretended that the most intimate converse with it through the medium of its literature tends to elicit or to cultivate our more generous sympathies.

In this respect, modern civilization differs from, and greatly excels the ancient. It is of a higher order—more genial, more gentle, more prolific of benefits, more redolent of the heart. Every century witnesses some progress in this direction. Our public pursuits—our great national enterprises—the objects upon which common thought, interest, and activity, converge—are becoming increasingly expressive of good-will rather than of mere power—of care for others—of a desire to widen the circle of human enjoyment, and to extirpate some of the chief "roots of bitterness" which trouble the peace of mankind. Charity is a flower, the commonness of which has imparted a special peculiarity to the Christian era. Man never so readily, never so systematically, stretched out his hand to aid or to relieve his fellow-man, as he has done since the coming of Christ. And it is to be observed, that the disposition increases. There is, at the present moment, a more active and general exercise of benevolence than at any former period of the world's history. The time, the money, and the energy, expended, in one way or another, sometimes in desultory, sometimes in concerted efforts, to do good to those who are thought to need it, present an aggregate greater, perhaps, than has been displayed by any preceding age. It makes no essential difference to the view we are taking, whether this care for others shows itself in wise or unwise schemes—in relation to the body or the soul—in sectarian or in comprehensive forms—in political or in religious movements. It is to the fuller development of the sentiment itself, in whatever fashion it may dress itself, that attention is invited. And this,



we submit, constitutes a marked and growing peculiarity of modern times—and one, the beneficial tendency and results of which, cannot well be overrated.

To us it appears indisputable, that we owe this fuller development of the humane and kindly sympathies of our nature to the influence of Christianity. The hypothetical cause and the effect closely correspond. We have in the facts and doctrines which are taken to constitute objectively the religion of Jesus, direct and powerful incentives to the culture of benignity and disinterestedness. The life of Him who called himself so pointedly and systematically the Son of Man is, throughout, one beautiful, impressive, and consistent exemplification of goodwill to men, and the study and imitation of it, in this view, is frequently and earnestly urged upon his disciples, both by himself and by his apostles. All the great truths and principles of this spiritual system are calculated to quicken and foster a feeling of reverence for man, as man—a disposition to regard him in the essential attributes of his nature, and the dignity of his relationships, rather than in the accidents of his position—and a habit of evincing love to God by doing good, as opportunity occurs, to all men. There is, therefore, a natural capability in the system for producing the effect which we feel warranted in ascribing to it. Looked at historically, moreover, the antecedent and the consequent agree in their proportionate relations the one to the other. When and where the Christian faith has been least modified by extraneous and unauthorised elements, and is in most obvious accordance with the model of it set forth in the New Testament, we meet with the most numerous traces of the peculiarity alluded to. In those parts of the world which are least in contact with Christianity, in any of its forms, the prevailing type of character in this regard is low, and, what is more significant, stationary from age to age—in those which are under the dominion of such forms of it as are manifestly distorted by priestcraft and kingcraft, we may see public institutions, the original object of which was plainly benevolent, perverted to selfish and mischievous ends. But in countries in which the predominant religious faith is most directly and individually derived from the Scriptures, the



characteristic we have previously described is most prominently displayed. Take England, for example, the most favourable, perhaps, but by no means the only specimen, on a large scale, of the humanizing influence of Christian principles. Is it not obvious that here, at least, the maxims of the Gospel are actively contending with the maxims of human selfishness? Is it not a fact, that almost every conquest effected in behalf of the wronged and the suffering, almost every movement undertaken to raise the depressed, whether physically or mentally—almost every institution reared and maintained to succour the wretched, to shelter the unfortunate, to reclaim the erring, to instruct the ignorant—almost every organized and continuous effort made to abolish war, to extirpate slavery, to mitigate the severities of criminal law, and to rescue the degraded from the vice of intemperance—is it not a fact, that these things are intimately associated with the religious faith of the people, spring naturally out of it, derive additional strength from it, and mainly rely on it for persuasive arguments? It is beside the mark to tell us that Christianity does not expressly prohibit this or that form of human tyranny—that we owe to Norman chivalry the elevation of woman, and to the ancient Germans our love of freedom—that slavery still exists in amicable alliance with this faith, and that men are as much given to the indulgence of warlike passions now, so far at least as they can hope to gain by them, as ever they were. The answer is, that the essential spirit of Christian truth is incompatible with these evils, and that wherever it is recognised, there will be a protest, more or less effective, against the continuance of them—a protest followed up by efforts to remove them. The relationship which Christianity declares to subsist between man and God, and, as a corollary, between man and his fellow, the duties consequent upon that relationship, and the principles which animate to their performance, imply a strong condemnation of the evils referred to. If, therefore, it were true that in the infancy of this religious system, its bearing upon then existing social questions was not distinctly perceived, it would yet be premature and rash to affirm, that the gradual advance of opinion and feeling in relation to these

subjects, which subsequent ages have displayed, was in no way owing to the Christian faith. That which quickened and exercised all the more amiable instincts of our nature, and pointed to man, as man, as a worthy object of good-will and kindness, must needs have contributed, so far as its influence was felt, to produce the state of moral sensitiveness which detected wrong in customs which had been previously allowed, and which Christianity itself had not specifically denounced. At any rate, it is a fact that in our own day the most active and powerful motives to the extirpation of war, slavery, and social oppression in its most concealed forms, are found in the doctrines and maxims of Christ's gospel, and that they who make the largest sacrifices with this view, and who do, and have done, most to brave public opinion, and to enlighten and purify it, profess to have been stimulated thereto by a regard to his will.

#### § 19. ITS PROMISE AND PROSPECTS OF UNIVERSALITY.

One other feature of the phenomenon before us, invites attention, and it is the last to which we shall make reference. Christianity professes to aim at an universal spiritual conquest. It addresses itself to the whole race of man. It speaks with some confidence of subjugating under its sway all peoples. The kingdom of Christ is to swallow up all other kingdoms, and to him, as Lord, every knee is to bow and every tongue confess. These, undoubtedly, are bold and large pretensions. They are not, however, belied by what we may designate the natural capabilities of the faith. It is constructed, if so we may speak, upon no local basis. It seeks to come in contact with man's nature below any of its accidental varieties, and makes its appeal to susceptibilities which are common to all. Its positive institutions are few, simple, easy of avail under all circumstances, and, while represented as ministering to life, are nowhere insisted on as necessary to it. Mercy rather than sacrifice—love rather than law—spirit rather than form—here are religious elements equally suitable in every age, equally adapted to man's condition in every clime. Here are no meddling, no precise, no detailed specifications of duty, either

in relation to God, or man, which might render obedience irksome in some states of society, impossible in others. The system is sublimely simple—and throughout, looks to humanity in its primary and essential attributes and principles. All this, however, it is readily conceded, proves nothing more than what it *may*, not what it *will*, do. The result to which it conducts us is merely negative, and the sum of it is this, that there is nothing in Christianity which should render its universal sway impossible. But, it will surely be allowed, in addition, that the likelihoods of the case are worth observation. This religion is domesticated among a people already predominant in political power, in science, arts and commerce, and in territorial possessions. The more enterprising spirit, the active intellect, the knowledge which is power, and the stronger will, are the undeniable characteristics of that branch of the human family, which firmly holds as yet the Christian faith. They are spreading themselves rapidly over the vast continent of America. They seek at many points an entrance into Africa. They will give a teeming population to the immense plains of Australasia. They hold under their dominion the whole of India. They are making their presence and their power felt on the outskirts of China. And, it seems certain, that wherever they permanently establish themselves, they will diffuse the gospel. The feebleness of Orientalism cannot permanently withstand the perpetual onset upon it of a more active mind, and a more commanding will. Nay, more. Science and commerce are opening up highways to this restless family through the very heart of the old world—and are everywhere multiplying the points of contact between them and the rest of mankind. Already their moral influence is extensive beyond calculation. What will it be two or three centuries hence, when they will probably constitute the majority in numbers, as they are now the supreme in power, of the several races of mankind? Unless, therefore, Christianity is pretty early exploded or superseded, it seems destined, in the natural course of events, to occupy not long hence a very different relative position to other religious faiths, compared with any it has yet done. The intellectual scepticism of the day, even if founded in reason,



will hardly be able to stay the progress of a system which has now so many odds in its favour—and to which Divine Providence appears, with whatever ulterior purpose, to have allotted a most promising future. Logic might almost as well try to retard population, as to stop the tide of events which bears the religion of Jesus on its bosom. Whether true or false, whether God's gift or man's device, it is certain that the system is now bound up with probabilities, quite distinct from its own inherent vitality, which give to its predictions of universal dominion a very plausible air. It would seem as if all great providential movements were concurring to favour its magnificent pretensions—as if all the vast changes within the ken of a sagacious foresight fall in and dovetail with the spiritual future which the gospel of Jesus teaches us to anticipate—as if nature, and art, and science, and philosophy, nay! the very bent and bias of human selfishness, in this age, were unconsciously exalting the valleys, making low the hills, and preparing the way of the Lord—a highway for our God. Now, it will be granted, we imagine, that this feature of the phenomenon under investigation is singular and striking. It has been very imperfectly described—but, even as here presented, it deserves notice, and should engage reflection. Missions to the heathen can be ridiculed without incurring the pointed censure of our guides of opinion. But here the work is planned by a higher than man, and will be carried into effect by a stronger than man, on a scale of grandeur beyond any we have yet witnessed. An immense expansion of Christianity has become as certain as anything future can be. And this, too, without taking into account any more active development of its moral power than it has commonly exhibited. It must be extinguished, or it will spread. It has become identified with all the great elements of human progress in modern times—and, even if it be not what it claims to be, it cannot but go, as things are, wherever steam goes, wherever civilization goes, wherever Anglo-Saxon enterprise and energy go, wherever modern literature goes. This, too, is something.



## § 20. SUMMARY VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY AS A PHENOMENON.

In as few words as possible, we will attempt to gather up the foregoing observations, and bring the phenomenon, in all its principal aspects, under one view. Quite irrespectively of any theory on the origin of Christianity, the following outline of the facts of the case will give us a pretty accurate notion of the direction in which our subsequent inquiries may most fitly proceed.

Outspread before us we have a scene of deep and painful interest to all who believe in the spiritual nature, capabilities, and destiny of man. The soul of humanity paralyzed—dim, uncertain, confused in its apprehensions—impotent in conscience—with scarcely so much pulsation at the heart as to give assurance that the spark of life has not gone out—the whole world of mankind, Jew and Gentile, learned and unlearned, civilized and barbarous, alike unconscious of, or indifferent to, its relationship to the Father of Spirits, and the duties and pleasures identified with a recognition and appreciation of His glorious character and perfect will. The worst symptom of the sad case is a total lack of spiritual energy—a seeming absence of all motive power adequate to insure a healthy discharge of the functions of the inner man, and still less to resist the steady encroachments of disease. The general tendency of things is from bad to worse—and the moral malady, even in the view of its moaning and helpless victim, is becoming desperate. Just at this gloomy crisis of man's history, when religious faith, hope, and love are prostrate, wasted by an apparently incurable atrophy, Jesus Christ, assuming to be commissioned thereto by God himself, spends some three years in Galilee and Judea, in founding a new dispensation, and is then put to death as a blasphemer and a malefactor. What he did, what he taught, and what he suffered, during those three brief years, became instantly a spring of spiritual life to the world. Dreamy, distorted, grotesque notions of God and his purposes, of man and his destiny, give place to clearer, nobler, more consistent, more exalted views. Conscience recovers its sensitiveness, and

exerts its all-conquering power. Society feels its heart throb with new life. There has evidently been infused into it an element of nervous vitality, to which it has been long a stranger. The spiritual in man's nature, obedient to some invisible law, struggles with the material, and proves its title to supremacy, and its competence to maintain it. Life gains upon death. Sensibility, power, enjoyment, in respect to divine things, to truth, to righteousness, to communion with the Highest, widen their domain, and the limits within which healthy action goes on are rapidly enlarged. There is resistance—but to no purpose. A religious life has been evoked, and cannot be stifled by coarse and violent methods. Nor scoffs, nor threats, nor sword, nor fire, nor learning, nor philosophy, can put out that which, but a few years before, it seemed impossible to kindle. Rome smiles incredulously at first—then feels in its own veins the tingle of spiritual vitality—struggles to expel the strange invasion—and is itself subdued. Much, perhaps, of what meets the eye is symptomatic only—but beneath it, and perceptible to unprejudiced observation, there is a substantial reality—a faith that can remove mountains—a full assurance of hope, the hope of immortality—a constraining and victorious love. As we watch the marvellous progress of this novel religious movement, and mark on every hand the indications of its power and depth, we naturally ask by what means and influences it is promoted. Averting our attention from everything claiming to be regarded as miraculous, we have nothing left but the earnest proclamation by simple-minded men of certain facts and doctrines of which the departed Jesus was the centre—no power of law, no influence of rank and station, no worldly wealth, no flattering bait to the sensual passions, no political arts or promises embodying the vain wishes of the vulgar. A few men agree in testifying to certain marvels which they cannot but have themselves believed, and give such additional force to their testimony as sanctity of life can impart. That is all—literally all. But the spiritual life which they generated by this seemingly inadequate instrumentality rapidly increases in volume, passes to all the principal seats of cultured intelli-

gence, possesses, pervades, assimilates them, and establishes itself in the world as a permanent power. Gradually, the reaction of Paganism oppresses it, and a long and dreary winter of priestcraft drives that life beneath the surface of human affairs, to manifest itself only here and there, at unfrequent intervals. But scarcely does mind awake from the slumber and incoherent dreams of centuries, than this same life, nurtured by the same truths, and marked by the same power, as of old, bursts forth again. It remains, to this day, the strongest moral element of which we have any knowledge. Numberless are the instances in which it grapples with human selfishness and subdues it, as no other known agency does or can. Countless are the disquieted and trembling souls which it soothes to peace, and into the darkness of which it radiates a "blessed hope." It is modifying for good the spirit of the times—developing to an extent, surpassing all former precedent, man's interest in, and care for, his fellow-man—tempering modern civilization with a genial glow—and bringing into more healthful and active play the heart's purest and most disinterested affections. And all present probabilities point to a future in which its sway shall be much more extensive—in which it shall possess the larger part of the world's population, and by the intelligence, enterprise, and influence with which it has become associated, undermine and overthrow all less vital systems of religious faith and worship.

§ 21. THE MAIN PROBLEM IT PRESENTS IS ONE OF SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS.

Here, then, we have the rise, growth, permanence, and manifestation of a spiritual *power*, which will remain to be accounted for even if scientific criticism should succeed in erasing the whole of the New Testament. It sprung up in a manner dissimilar from any other with which we are acquainted. It has forced a way for itself to wide dominion, not unlikely to become universal, under a set of conditions peculiarly calculated to test its capabilities. It is not too much to assume that, on the whole, the world has gained something by its introduction and subsequent course—that

it has stimulated into life and activity the religious element of man's nature, so as no other power has done—so as no other power of which we are cognisant is competent to do. It continues to do so—and could we but conceive it to be wholly withdrawn to-morrow, we should naturally expect, whatever view we may entertain of its origin, that there would result an immense collapse of the religious sentiment, and that in regard to all that pertains to spiritual culture and development, society would experience a speedy and marked retrogression. This power, then, constitutes the phenomenon which philosophy is bound to investigate. Here it is—here is what it has done—here is what the balance of probabilities warrants our anticipation that it will do. Whatever may become of the gospels, this spiritual force is a fact which no logic can disprove. To what are we to refer it? How may we most satisfactorily explain it? Wherein consists its singular potency over the religious element of man's constitution? Does it come from God, or from man? by way of revelation, or by intuition? Is its strength that of truth, or of error? If of truth, is it associated in its origin with an external history upon which we can substantially rely, or with an accumulation of fabulous traditions, myths, and fictions? We submit that any inquiry into the origin of Christianity which does not recognise it as a stimulant of spiritual life, and which regards it merely in its relation to our intellectual faculties, must be, from the nature of the case, eminently unsatisfactory. We have to make out, if possible, the natural history, not of a certain system of opinions, but of an active spiritual force. Our main business is with the dynamics of the question.

§ 22. INSEPARABLY ASSOCIATED WITH AN INDIVIDUAL PERSONAL HISTORY.

Power, however, is not the only special characteristic of the phenomenon under review. That power emanates chiefly from an individual personal history. So far as the world has been moved by Jesus Christ, it has been by faith in, not so much what he said, as what he was, what he did, what he suffered.



All the doctrines of this system have, from the beginning, been regarded—whether properly or improperly is not now the question—as springing out of, associated with, and coloured by, the life of the Nazarene. Strictly speaking, *He* is the spirit of gospel testimony. His relationship to God—his mission to man—his mediatorial office—the tenour of his life—the purpose of his death—the triumph of his resurrection—the unlimited extent of his authority—these are the ideas, all personal in their reference, which have mainly wrought the revolution we have just glanced at. *He*, as pictured to us in the gospel narratives, and illustrated in the apostolic writings, constitutes the one source of this spiritual power—the main-spring of the whole movement. The hopes, the fears, the joys, the sorrows, the sympathies, the resolutions, of his followers cluster round him as their sole and sufficient object. Their penitence is elicited by his trials and agonies. Their peace is peace in him. About him their tenderest and strongest affections twine themselves. His word is their law—his love their motive—his example their stimulus—his sympathy their solace. It was his name which inspired with courage and fortitude “the noble army of martyrs”—it is the story of his life and death which still is most effectual to subdue man’s heart. The grand stir which the introduction of Christianity has produced, is owing far less to its abstract truths, than to the personal form in which it exhibits them. Strip them of their historical dress, and although they remain essentially the same, they are not the same in the view of human nature, any more than a monarch, although himself unchanged, is unchanged to his subjects, when divested of all the outward symbols of his authority. All this, in the eye of philosophy, may indicate a very low state of spiritual development. Nevertheless, we cannot, if we would, get rid of the fact. There it stands out before us, in boldest relief—and he would be much more daring than wise who should deny that, so far as observation and experience have hitherto gone, it is demonstrable that the chief force of the Christian faith has resided in its historical and personal embodiment and expression.

## § 23. OFFERING TO THE WORLD AN ACCOUNT OF ITS OWN ORIGIN.

And this leads us to the last remark we deem it necessary to make on Christianity as a phenomenon. It tells its own story. The question as to whether the books of the New Testament were written at the dates usually ascribed to them, and by the men whose names are identified with them, however interesting and important in other connexions, is quite irrelevant in this. Whether they were or were not, it is certain that they, substantially as we have them now, have constituted the leverage by which society has been moved to the extent we have very imperfectly sketched. To the image they have impressed on the world's mind, we owe the world's movement in this matter. Whatever spiritual life has been awakened by this system, or is still kept alive by it, was awakened and is kept alive by the idea of Jesus as exhibited by the evangelists, and by the doctrines associated with his earthly career, as developed by the apostolic epistles. If it were true that the history, as we have it, had been "rounded off by tradition" previously to the middle of the second century, it is also true that it has been by the history *as so "rounded,"* that the general sweep of this revolution has been determined. If all that is miraculous in the gospel narratives is but a precipitate from glowing passions on natural incidents—if all that is peculiar to, and distinctive of, Christianity as a religious system is but the happy speculation of men possessed of a strange delusion—it is yet unquestionable that those narratives and that speculation, in the very form in which they have reached us, have generated the life, and moved to the action, and effected the moral changes, to which we have referred. Suppose, for argument's sake, that the memoirs of Jesus Christ, after having passed through the alembic of scientific criticism, are proved to be but a small part facts, and the greater part fiction, it is yet to be borne in mind that the efflux of virtue which has brought about so vast a result in the world's experience, has been from the adulterated article. Unprejudiced common sense will look at it thus: here is a great spiritual movement—here, the identical lever by which that movement has been produced—and the force

necessary to the one is the proper measure of the force supplied by the other.

§ 24. POINTS FOR INQUIRY SUGGESTED BY THE PHENOMENON AS  
A WHOLE.

Take, now, this phenomenon, as we have slightly sketched it, and what are the main inquiries it suggests? An immense number and variety of facts, strewn abundantly over the surface of history for nearly nineteen centuries, point to an active, powerful, and permanent spiritual force, operative more or less amongst men, throughout that whole period. That force we know to have been exerted upon society by the religious ideas presented to us in the writings constituting the New Testament, and by the special and peculiar form in which they have been so presented. But the New Testament refers us for the origin of that force to God. It claims to be a revelation of his mind and will—a showing of himself to mankind for their advantage—an uncovering of his thoughts and purposes, as it regards them, in such a light as may waken up the faculties of their spiritual nature, and give them meet exercise and enjoyment. Now is this claim intellectually inadmissible? Does it, in itself, and abstractedly, involve conditions at variance with the constitution of human nature, or unbecoming the character of the Supreme? Or is the form in which it is put—the drapery, if we may be allowed the figure, in which this professedly divine idea approaches man, to attract his attention, and, kindle his hope, and engage his heart—ill adapted to its purpose, or out of keeping with the general laws which govern God's proceedings of an educational and disciplinary nature? Or is the evidence on which its authority rests, or are the alleged facts which testify to us that the idea is God's, comes from him, represents him, and will carry up the soul of man to him, such as can only be received by putting a strain upon our reason, suspending or reversing our usual processes of investigation, or employing less stringent methods than is common with us in discriminating the real from the fictitious? Because, unless we are compelled to give to these queries an affirmative answer, there would seem to be no sufficient ground for rejecting



the account which Christianity has given of itself. If we are at last constrained by intellectual doubts and difficulties to admit that the main tissue of the gospel narratives is fictitious, or, at least, incapable of being proved satisfactorily to our unbiassed judgment, and wholly untrustworthy as a manifestation of God to man, then must we needs adopt the conclusion that, in the course of God's Providence, and as an important feature of his moral administration, the most powerful spiritual force of which the world has hitherto had cognizance—that which has done most to rouse man's spiritual nature to self-consciousness, and to give most active play to its faculties and emotions, has been begotten by a mistake—is the result, not of facts, but of the exaggeration of facts by a generation of ardent enthusiasts—and that no display of God by means of his unquestioned works, by the objects, laws, and processes of Nature, has been half so successful in lifting the soul God-ward, and attaching it to the true, the righteous, the good, the infinite, as one marvellous story woven by human imagination, in which the facts are few, and the embellishments of them make up its main substance and purport. But even this conclusion will not be without its doubts and difficulties of an intellectual kind—will not be free from unaccountable aspects, and impenetrable mysteries. Such as it is, however, this is the alternative which the whole phenomenon presents. Christianity is from God, or from man. If from God, it is accounted for as a spiritual power—if from man, wherein consists the secret of its superior strength? In the one case, there are intellectual objections to the hypothesis, but if they can be met, the problem constituted by the facts is solved. In the other case, the hypothesis is also beset with intellectual difficulties, which, if removed, would leave the same problem unexplained.

The following pages will be devoted to the consideration of the questions above adverted to as springing out of the phenomenon previously described. Whether many, if not most, of the intellectual difficulties felt to the reception of Christianity as a revelation of God, are not owing to the selection of a



wrong stand-point from which to survey it—and whether viewed from the ground to which the preceding observations have conducted us, faith in Christ as “the image of the invisible God,” requires human reason to be put under constraint, remains to be seen. The plan we have marked out for ourselves, however, is rather of a positive than of a negative character. It will be our aim to place Christianity in what strikes us as the right light for a fair consideration of its claims. We need to ascertain, in the outset, what is its real mission—inasmuch as if we regard it as having come amongst us to do what it was not intended nor needed to do, and wholly overlook its main purport and intent, no end of objections may occur to us which would be fatal but that they do not apply. Our first business, therefore, will be to come at the object of this professed revelation, as set forth in various ways by itself. This done, we shall be in the best position for determining whether that object is a necessary and feasible one—whether Christianity is well adapted to compass it—and whether, either in the end proposed, or the means employed, there is any violation of the established principles on which God is conducting his moral administration.



## PART II.

### THE REVELATION.

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## THE REVELATION.

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### § 1. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INSTRUCTION AND SUASION.

WHEN Demosthenes declared the first requisite of a successful orator to be "action," the second "action," the third "action," the word he employed, we presume, comprehended in its meaning a great deal more than mere gesticulation. Judging from his own speeches, he was not a likely man to "o'erstep the modesty of nature" any more in the delivery than in the composition of his harangues; nor do we suppose that he was at all given to "tear a passion to rags." We understand his *dictum* as the expression of a profound truth—that the chief power of an orator lies in a natural and appropriate display of his earnestness, and that he who proposes to take captive by his eloquence the will of others, must show the strength and vehemence of his own will. If, now, we were to criticise his celebrated saying as though it were intended to indicate his opinion as to the best mode of conveying instruction to the mind, rather than of swaying by means of speech the entire man, we might array against his supposed theory a phalanx of sound objections; we might bring to bear against it many a weighty argument and much incontestable philosophy; and we might seem to onlookers to achieve an easy and unquestionable triumph in vindication of the mind's superiority over mere modes and accidents in the communication of knowledge—but we should not have so much as touched the allegation of the prince of orators. It is one thing to gain over the understanding to our conclusions—it is another and a very different thing to win sympathy for our purposes. The means

and processes necessary to the one are not equally competent to the other—and in passing judgment on their congruity, it is of the utmost importance that we should have first ascertained whether they are resorted to with a view to enlighten the mind, or to move the heart.

A father, say, is desirous of instructing his son in the duties which arise out of his filial relationship, his position, and his prospects. In such a case his communications will assume the shape of information, and of reasoning built upon it. He will begin with statements which the boy can readily understand, and to which he will yield an unhesitating assent. He will endeavour to avail himself of all the intellectual instruments by which mind usually seeks to reproduce its convictions in mind—analysis, comparison, illustration, inference, analogy, and authoritative assertion. Upon the skilful use of these instruments, rather than upon any peculiarity of tone, gesture, or manner, he will depend for best effecting his end. His object requires that whatever power is brought to bear upon the youth's mind, should be resident in, and associated with, the truths to be communicated. The natural influence he has over his child as a father, so far from assisting him—save, perhaps, to secure ready attention—will be apt to render his task more difficult, by inducing the lad to take for granted what it is desirable he should arrive at by a fair logical process. He will, therefore, rely pretty exclusively on clearness of statement, aptness of illustration, and force of argument, rather than on any display of parental emotion, and his end may be obtained quite as well, if not better, by letter, than by *vivâ voce* utterances. But if it be his purpose to move rather than to instruct—if he seeks, not so much to enlighten as to persuade—if, for instance, he would elicit trust, or draw out affection, or change the strong current of the will; those methods will be instinctively felt to be the most appropriate, which best exhibit his inner self, his heart. It matters not in such case that language is incomplete and incoherent—that expressions are hyperbolic, and imagery confused, and assertions made which appear irreconcilable one with another. On the contrary, these very defects and infirmities may conduce to his main

object, by indicating the intensity of his feeling. The real power of the man will stream along other than those formal channels cut for him by the intellect. The tones of the voice will have their witchery. The eye will speak. The whole countenance will do the work of interpretation. Every action, every gesture, will be suggestive—and, perhaps, a gentle pressure of the hand, a kiss, a starting tear, a sudden change of colour, will do the work which logic might have for ever laboured at in vain. We have put these two processes into juxtaposition with the view of reminding the reader how necessary it is, in pronouncing an opinion on the congruity of a certain order of means, to have before him a definite idea of the end which they are employed to attain. In the two foregoing suppositions the purposes are taken to be widely different, and each obviously calls for a different process. If, now, we can fancy a critic misfitting the process in the last case, where *suasion* is intended, to the purpose in the first case, which is simple *enlightenment*, and, under the influence of this mistake, pronouncing judgment on the aptitude of the one to effect the other, we should not be at all surprised to hear him remark, with undeniable force, or cutting severity, on the strange deficiencies, incoherences, and incompatibilities everywhere apparent to him. What he said might be very true—quite unanswerable—but irrelevant to the case before him—for he would be philosophizing on the hypothesis that the boy's intellect was addressed, whereas it was mainly his heart.

§ 2. THIS DIFFERENCE COMMONLY OVERLOOKED IN REGARD TO  
CHRISTIANITY.

Now, the radical error which we take to underlie the greater part of the intellectual objections adduced against Christianity as a revelation of God, is similar in kind to that above specified. It is assumed by the sceptical, who, we must admit, may plead in justification of what they do, the grounds occupied by enlightened apologists of the faith, that the gospel is an expedient for the communication to mankind of certain religious ideas otherwise unattainable—a sort of appendix to the open volume of Nature, in which have been placed a number

of peculiar truths resting for their authority on the divine word, and not deducible by reasoning from the divine works. Viewed from this stand-point, Christianity appears to be open to many and serious objections. Very plausibly, if not conclusively, it may be argued that these same religious ideas spring up spontaneously in the human mind when operated upon by external conditions of a given, but, by no means, uncommon character—that the very aptitude of the intellect to receive and comprehend them proves its advance, by natural means, to their very borders; for that what we have not within us the power to discover by the use of our mental faculties, we have not the power to understand when communicated—that it is not in analogy with God's general method of instructing mankind to make provision for it up to a certain extent in accordance with the laws which regulate the acquisition of knowledge, and beyond that boundary to institute a very different and altogether exceptional process—and that, in point of fact, the religious ideas embodied in Christianity are not peculiar to it; that one or other of them will be found in almost every form of religious faith; and that the greatest and most cultivated minds of the heathen world, prior to the appearance of Jesus Christ, had announced to the world substantially the same truths, although, perhaps, with less authority and fulness. We do not say that these, and many like objections, cannot be met and refuted—but we do say, that if Christianity can be shown to be an expedient, not to *impart* new religious ideas, but to *vivify* pre-existent ones—not so much to convey something beyond reach to the intellect, as to stimulate dormant affections and subjugate the will—if, in short, it was intended to approach man's nature, not on its logical, but on its emotional side—then, all these objections are irrelevant. The proper answer to them is, that they do not apply. Good reasons, and unanswerable, may be given against a man's course, when, starting from London, he is supposed to be making his way to Edinburgh through Bristol and Exeter—but if Edinburgh be not in reality his destination, but the Land's End, the reasons, however good in themselves, fall to the ground. If it be true, then, that an erroneous view has



been taken of the direction in which Christianity was meant to proceed, it will be more pertinent, by far, to point out that error, than to combat specifically, and on their own ground, the objections founded upon it.

§ 3. COMMUNICATION OF NEW RELIGIOUS IDEAS NOT ITS MAIN OBJECT.

If, now, we could succeed in erasing from our minds, for the time being, all our conceptions derived from extraneous sources of the object aimed at by Christianity, and peruse the documents upon which that faith rests with a view to ascertain its drift from them exclusively, we should find very little indeed to lead us to the conclusion that the communication to the world of new and otherwise undiscoverable religious ideas, is its main purport. No shout of "Eureka," such as both its advocates and its opponents would have led us to expect, will be heard proceeding from that quarter. The general tone pervading the New Testament, and, more or less, the Old also, is not that which indicates a consciousness of announcing propositions of startling novelty, or of solving problems which must ever have baffled the search of the human intellect. On the contrary, the Bible seems to proceed on the assumption that men in general have possessed the means of acquiring many religious ideas of which they are content to remain in ignorance, and that if they had been disposed to avail themselves of the opportunities by which they are surrounded, they might have attained to very profitable knowledge both of God and of themselves. The apostle Paul, for example, when speaking of "the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," intimates that they who are exposed to it are such as "hold *the truth* in unrighteousness"—"because," he proceeds, "that which *may be known* of God is manifest in them: for God has showed it unto them." How? Not by special revelation, for it is of the heathen world that he thus writes, but by means of the book of Nature. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made—even his eternal power and Godhead." In truth, so far from

challenging for the gospel an exclusive power of communicating correct religious ideas, this apostle appears to go out of his way on some occasions for the express purpose of showing that the truths upon which he insists have been proclaimed by other men, and might be collected from other premises. When preaching at Athens, he betrays no jealousy of pagan philosophy, as if it were necessary in order to vindicate the claims of the faith he taught to deny or to undervalue all spiritual doctrines not supernaturally imparted—but in confirmation of what he is himself advancing, remarks approvingly, “As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.” And that capability of knowing which he ascribes to man, in reference to the being and attributes of God, and our relationship to him, he speaks of unhesitatingly as competent to decide questions of practical duty—“For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law *written in their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.” Such declarations as these are the more noticeable, inasmuch as they appear on a background in perfect harmony with their tenour. There is little or nothing in the sacred writings of Christianity calling attention to the fact that it is making a discovery of truths which the human mind could never have reached. All the primary notions of divine things which it embodies, it rather takes for granted, than announces as novelties. There is about it no air of “exclusive intelligence”—nothing in style or expression which suggests that the writers felt in general like men who are communicating secrets to which no intellect could have pierced its way. For the most part, they tell their story as men expecting to be credited because they were familiar with the facts they narrated; and upon those facts they make comments, and base doctrines, and found obligations, precisely as men might have done who thought them pertinent and obvious, but who had no suspicion that they were unveiling truths which had been supernaturally disclosed to them.

## § 4. BUT TO AWAKEN RELIGIOUS LIFE.

But, undoubtedly, there is an aspect in which Christianity assumes an air of exclusive pretension. Taking it at its own word, its one purpose is to "give LIFE"—SPIRITUAL LIFE. Herein consists its originality—it comes "to save." No one can study its records without perceiving that its business is moral rather than intellectual. The knowledge it professes to communicate is that which is appropriated by the affections rather than the understanding. The religious ideas which it sets before man are ideas to be comprehended by the heart. The grand mystery which it unveils is the LOVE of God—and this can only be recognised and appreciated by sympathetic emotions. Its object is not to increase knowledge, as such—for according to its own declaration "knowledge puffeth up"—but to beget and nourish love by that kind of knowledge which is laid hold of not by the head, but the heart. Religion is no more a science than courtship. The former, it is true, must have its thoughts—its perceptions, reasonings, conclusions—as well as the latter—but then the specific nature of them will be emotional. There are two ways in which one may acquaint himself, or be made acquainted, with his fellow-man. He who lectures on the natural history of humanity—who places vividly before us the anatomical, physiological, or psychological laws by which he is governed—is employing one method of adding to our knowledge of man—and, of course, of any given individual whom we desire to understand better. But there are views of himself which that individual alone can display—nor can we properly be said to know him until he has showed us something of his heart. He will not do this—he cannot do it propositionally—but mediately, in a countless variety of ways. And in doing it, he imparts to us new ideas of himself—in a word, *reveals* just that relating to what he is, and what he is to us, which we are most deeply interested in knowing. Now, it is in this last sense, and not in the first, that Christianity offers itself as a revelation of God. This is the sort of knowledge which it undertakes to communicate—knowledge given by love with a view to love. And hence, all the methods



and instruments of communication are peculiar to its work. It displays the love of God, not in scientific propositions, nor logical definitions—not by written lectures on the Divine nature and perfections, wherein there are utterances too profound to be attributed to human reason. Not at all. But it illustrates it by a series of Providential facts, and above and beyond all, embodies it in a *life*—the life of a man, in all respects “like as we are, but without sin.” And these facts were arranged and ordered, and this life was lived, and both were recorded in Holy Writ, that men might become “wise unto salvation”—pure as God is pure—that they might turn to him as to their Father, and love him as he first loved them. This, if we mistake not, is the light in which the gospel of Jesus Christ professes to be a revelation of what could not be otherwise known of God, and it is in this light that its claims should be investigated.

At the risk of repeating what has already been advanced, we will endeavour to set the distinction just pointed out in a yet clearer light—confident as we are that a large class of intellectual objections to Christianity spring from inattention to this peculiarity of it. Take the fundamental religious ideas pervading the Scriptures—the One God, eternal, immortal, invisible—man, his creature, dependent on him, and accountable to him—universal guilt, capable, however, of being removed by forgiveness—a future state of rewards and punishments—the efficacy of prayer—the principle of mediation:—the claim of the Christian faith to be received as a revelation of God is not based upon its origination of these ideas. They may, or they may not, have been introduced to man’s mind by its sole means—that is a question which need not detain us. Because, if it could be shown that every one of these primary religious notions lay within the limits of intellectual speculation, and may have been discovered, and were, as a matter of fact, discovered by the ordinary process of inquiry and reflection, not a step would be gained towards demonstrating a revelation, such as Christianity professes to be, altogether superfluous, and, therefore, unworthy of Supreme wisdom. These constitute, as it were, but the raw material of the system—the



simple elements which enter into its composition and structure. It is the special *form* given to these which warrants us in regarding Christ's gospel as the spiritual tuitional agency which the state of mankind required. Genius may speak to us through a marble statue, every block used in which may have been quarried from places within easy reach, and by hands other than those of the artist. But who shall hint that genius has told no tale by means of statuary, because the substance wrought by it into exquisite beauty was dug up and rough-hewn by common unskilled labour? Christianity does with the primary religious ideas to which we have referred, what the artistic mind does with its blocks of stone—puts them together, shapes them, makes them exhibit an unity of meaning—in one word, brings out to our spiritual faculties and emotions, a finished embodiment in human fact and history, of the divine character, relationship, and purpose—and designates it “The image of the invisible God.” It is not so much for what it shows us of the divine, but for the life, energy, and fulness with which it shows it to our sympathies, that it claims to be beyond origination by human faculties. Its pretensions have been chiefly canvassed as if falling exclusively under the first of these conditions—and, hence, a host of reasonable doubts and difficulties—but they ought in common fairness to it to be considered as coming under the last; and examined into, and pronounced upon, accordingly.

In the observations which follow, it is our intention to treat of Christianity in accordance with *its own* representation of its drift and aim. True philosophy prescribes this course. The gospel is an instrument for effecting some change or other in the world's condition. At any rate, this is its profession. Now, it seems obvious enough, that our examination of its fitness and efficiency should be conducted with reference to what it proposes to do. We are bound to pronounce a judgment on it, having a strict relation to its own pretensions, and to them only. It claims to be regarded as a manifestation of God. In what sense, we ask, and we seek the answer at its own mouth. Well, its reply is neither ambiguous nor indistinct. Given in its own words it is—“Glory to God in the

highest—peace on earth—good-will to men.” More specifically, it is a display of his “grace,” his benignity, favour, love to mankind, in and by Jesus Christ, that “they might have life”—have it in abundance. It is a project having love for its main power, love as its sole end. It is not the completion of a science, which, prior to its appearance had advanced as far as the means within reach would admit of. It is not a written supplement, intended by a change of method to furnish certain information concerning invisible realities which could not be conveyed to the mind of man through the medium of God’s works. It is not an afterthought acted upon in consequence of the failure of a former plan. Something equivalent to this, it is true, has been frequently insisted upon by its friendly exponents—but nothing like this, we will venture to affirm, can be collected from Christianity itself. It needs but a slight study of the biographical memoirs of its founder, and of the interpretative epistles of his immediate followers, to be convinced that its display of God is almost exclusively moral, with a view to moral results—in a word, and using terms and figures not strictly appropriate, but accommodated to our weakness—it is a revelation of heart to heart in order to sympathy, and not a communication of mind to mind in order to knowledge. Was any such revelation needed? If so, is Christianity fitted to answer the purpose, so as no other existing or conceivable means could have done? And again if so, is the entire system framed upon assumptions which man’s intellect is constrained, in spite of such moral fitness, to set aside as inadmissible? To the solution of these queries we now propose to apply ourselves.

§ 5. NEED OF SUCH A REVELATION ARGUED FROM THE RELIGIOUSNESS  
OF MAN’S NATURE.

Our first business, then, is to inquire whether any such moral display of the Deity as the gospel of Christ professes to make, was called for by the wants of human nature. Let us look at that nature in its religious aspect—for man, we shall do no violence to philosophy in assuming, is endowed with capabilities and susceptibilities answering, if we may so speak,

to religious ideas, as the eye to light, as the natural instincts to the objects which gratify them, as the intellect to abstract truth, as taste to beauty. For the sake of rendering ourselves intelligible we shall designate this aptitude, this higher sense, this primary element of spiritual life, religiousness. It is a part of man's being. The tendency which impels him to classify his ideas, and to infer causes from effects, is not more spontaneous, not more irrepressible, than that which prompts him to speculate upon, to commune with, and to worship, being and power beyond the reach of the senses and above the laws of matter. This endowment may be later than all others in the order of its development—but, given the requisite conditions, it is sure to appear. As there is a stage in every individual's history in which it is necessarily latent, and no sign of it can be detected, so it is just possible that whole tribes of men may here and there be found so closely approaching to a merely animal existence, as to exhibit no evidence whatever of its possession. Such a fact, however, if such a fact there be, no more proves the absence from our nature of a spiritual germ, than want of articulate speech in the infant proves that it lacks what will hereafter bud into reason. All our capabilities are governed in their action and manifestation by fixed and suitable laws. Still, it is to be observed that this religiousness of man pushes itself into notice quite independently of any formal tenets of belief. When midnight finds us wakeful, and its still gloom curtains in our solitude, and the thinking power is thrown back upon itself, cut off from its customary means of converse with the outer world, whence is it that a feeling of solemnity gradually steals over us, and there rises up unbidden in our souls a vague consciousness that we are not alone? When we sit abroad on a summer evening, and watch the going down of the sun behind the tranquil sea, and balmy airs breathe round us, and fragrant odours regale us, and the outspread scene before us changes momentarily the expression of its beauty, how comes it that the loveliness which we can see suggests to us an intelligent Cause of it whom we cannot see, and prompts us to bow our hearts in reverence and adoration? Or when sudden danger overtakes us, or the tempest



howls above us, or Nature turns towards us one of those ominous aspects beneath which the courage of the stoutest falters, what is it that makes us fall into a suppliant mood, and, in the agony of our fear, glance for needed succour towards an invisible power? This peculiar aptitude and tendency thus to look beyond the seen, thus to bend in awe before the impalpable, thus to cling for protection to an unknown potentate, is the basis of subjective religion. That we have it is a fact written in every man's experience. History is full of it.

§ 6. WHICH RELIGIOUSNESS CLAIMS THE GOVERNMENT OF HIS  
WHOLE BEING.

The entire class of faculties and sensibilities to which, for convenience sake, we give the generic title of religiousness, like artistic taste, may be all but smothered by neglect, and may be developed into marvellous strength by culture. But, as it advances towards maturity, it invariably assumes, and, to a greater or less extent, exercises, a sway over the whole domain of human consciousness. It is born to govern. It mounts the throne in virtue of its inherent rights, and gives law to all other powers and passions as holding an inferior position. It may, indeed, be resisted, rebelled against, deposed—but it never abdicates—never abnegates its title to sovereignty in man. And where its life has been fairly ministered to, and it has succeeded in establishing itself as “one having authority,” it rules with a vigour and a decision all its own. The tyranny of a master passion is oftentimes violent—but there are provinces of human nature which no mere usurpation can subdue. Take avarice, for example. Indulged, pampered, flattered into impatience of all constraint, like other too successful satraps, it first repudiates all law for itself, and then exalts its own will into the place of law. As it becomes accustomed to the use of its “sceptred sway,” it also becomes within certain limits irresistible. It can hold all the appetites in check. It can silence with a word the strongest natural affections. It can suppress anger under the most torturing provocations. It can buy off, or forcibly overcome,



the risings of pride. And it can clap conscience into prison, and practise indignities upon it until scarcely a spark of life and feeling remains. But there are higher powers which it can never subjugate. There will always continue reason to whisper in its ear that it is but an usurper, whose time is short, and whom inexorable death will bereave of all. The Haman of the soul will have a Mordecai at the gate, and a silent taunt, like a fly in the ointment of the apothecary, will ever be at hand to mar the completeness of success, and to remind the upstart that unlimited dominion will be grasped at in vain. But no such abatement characterises the rule of religiousness. Nothing that stirs within the boundaries of humanity, however hard the sacrifices that may be required of it, will hint that the supreme post of authority has been seized by a *parvenu*. It, too, may command with irresistible effect—hopes, fears, appetites, affections, life, death—but with this difference, that obedience will be rendered as fealty, not slavery. Illustrations of the supremacy of religiousness, as of admitted right, over man's entire being, are so numerous, so various, and so striking, as to render selection as embarrassing, as it appears to be superfluous. Nevertheless, and with a view rather to impression than conviction, we may venture upon submitting one example for study—that furnished by John Milton. Here is one in whom all the attributes of manhood are to be seen in healthy, robust, and well-proportioned development—lofty imagination, sturdy logic, and vivacious wit—tender sensibilities, strong passions, and an indomitable will. Follow this man through his career, and you will see him environed by successive sets of circumstances, which offered, each in its turn, a powerful temptation to yield himself unreservedly to the exclusive dominion of every single tendency and force of his nature. From early youth, however, his religiousness was sedulously cultured, and, making all due allowances for occasional outbreaks of infirmity, it governed all. His aspirations, his purposes, his plans, his noble self-sacrifices, his wondrous energy, his judgment—all were prompted, guided, regulated, harmonized, by the spiritual element. It was that which spurred him to early industry—

that which prompted him to keep watch and ward over youthful passions—that which sent him home to his country when her strife for liberty commenced—that which kindled in his bosom an inextinguishable fire of patriotism—that which persuaded him to resign in “defence of the people of England,” the sweet light of day for ever—that which enabled him to bear the loss with unrepining fortitude—that which strung his harp to minstrelsy, selected the themes of his sublime music, and inspired him with the gift of an almost superhuman insight into the realms of faith. Religiousness gives the key to his history. Over the whole man, and he in all respects a powerful man, it swayed its high and unquestioned authority. And who will say, that even in this instance, it assumed too high a place? or aimed at what transcended its native qualities and its appropriate sphere? Now, let it be borne in mind that this is the kind of supremacy to which religiousness, by an inherent law of its nature, evermore tends. It is not only an element in man’s complex constitution, but it puts in a rightful claim to be the dominant element. It can show just the same title to monarchy in the human soul, as it does to existence. The finger of God has written upon it its princely credentials. The blood of Royalty is in its veins—and it cannot be itself without being authoritative in purpose and demeanour.

§ 7. THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT PRESUPPOSES SOME PROVISION FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT.

If the foregoing observations are well warranted, we shall surely be justified by all analogy in expecting an ample provision in God’s arrangements for the sustenance, growth, and enjoyment of this important and influential element of man’s nature. Not an instinct, not an appetite, not a sensibility, not a power, is to be discovered in man, for which there are not correspondent external objects. He who endowed us with the power of recognising and appreciating beauty, has also given abundantly the requisite materials for its exercise and gratification. If with the great majority of mankind the gift is suffered to lie dormant for want of culture, or is a source of

far less pleasure than it is capable of being made, the fact is to be attributed solely to their negligence in this respect, not to any niggardliness in the divine economy regarding it. They may overlook, or throw away their opportunities of æsthetic cultivation—but there the opportunities are, notwithstanding, in sufficiency, in profusion, in superfluity. And it is further to be remarked that there is ever a special congruity of nature between the subjective faculty and the objective existence. For the pure intellect, there are questions of relation with which the passions cannot intermeddle. For those affections which are necessary to some important results independently of our own care and reasoning, there are objects which make their direct appeal to those affections without troubling them to consult the judgment, or to wait the issue of previous calculation. And where the man is to be addressed both as intelligent and susceptible of attachment, the provision made invariably has regard to both in their proportionate importance. We have good reason, therefore, to look for the operation of this same Providential law in connexion with man's spiritual nature. His power to perceive religious ideas, his aptitude to feel religious emotions, the delight he is capable of taking in religious exercises, and his tendency to be governed by the religious element, imply an external embodiment, in some form or other, of what will meet his wants in all these particulars. This highest class of human attributes will not be less cared for in the arrangements of Infinite Wisdom, nor, one would infer, less specifically addressed, than are the lower. Something there will be in the outer world of fact answering in kind to the strong yearnings of desire within. The sort of display which our religious nature instinctively craves, and in the absence of which it will set up for itself all manner of spurious substitutes, will be granted in a guise adapted, when fairly perceived, to yield satisfaction. Such anticipations, we contend, cannot be philosophically objected to. That which they look for is in strict accordance with all that we know of God's method of proceeding in other departments of his universal government, and we are not justified in surmising that where the weightiest of all

human interests are involved, Divine beneficence will give place to parsimony.

§ 8. THIS PROVISION NOT TO BE FOUND WITHIN THE LIMITS OF  
MAN'S OWN BEING.

Opinions, indeed, have been broached of late, which, so far as we have been able to comprehend their meaning, we are obliged to interpret into a conjecture that religiousness carries within itself the materials of its own life and growth—that the subjective and the objective are mysteriously one—and that the religious ideas which evoke and give play to the religious sensibilities, are, in some manner, we know not what, evolved from the hidden depths of our being: We need hardly waste time on this singular speculation—but we do hope it is not intended to pass for profound philosophy. Perhaps, we shall be forgiven, if we remind those who look with favour on this hypothesis that the process of evolution in this case, even if it could, in the nature of things, be successful, must require a great deal of previous abstraction, for which not one man in a million is qualified, and that when the truth which was supposed to lie enfolded in our constitution has been seized and brought to light, strong suspicion may be reasonably excited that it came from without to where it was found, and that it has only been recovered from forgetfulness, not originated by intuition and reflection. These felicitous instances of conjectured spontaneity in the production of religious ideas from the soil of the human mind, never seem to have occurred under conditions which would have rendered the dropping into it of a chance seed wholly impossible. On the contrary, they who deem themselves most independent, in their spiritual musings, of all external aids and ministrations, are those also who have in earlier life taken in a liberal supply of religious aliment from sources which they may have forgotten, but which, nevertheless, were, and still are, on the outside of their own being. The speculation, therefore, does not offer itself to our notice with any strong recommendation of internal probability, and that which it has to say for itself is very far from being unimpeachable. Now this, to say the least, is unfortunate in



an attempt to establish a fact utterly unlike, and seemingly at right angles with, every other fact with which we are acquainted. Our physical appetites, assuredly, do not find their material of satisfaction within themselves. Our senses rely for meet occupation and reward upon outward objects. Our intellect does not originate its own conceptions, apart from appropriate external embodiments of truth. We do not draw up our ideas of beauty from the obscure abyss of our own nature. Even the glorious faculty of insight presupposes objectivity as a necessary condition of its exercise. For, intuition must not be confounded with self-production. It merely sees *at a glance* latent and evasive truths which the mind would otherwise have reached by a ratiocinative process. That which it detects so instantaneously, is not fire in its own eye, but light emitted by some external object—light, however, which it perceives where other eyes would fail, by a high state of sympathetic sensitiveness. Even to religious intuition, therefore, there must be a revelation through some medium, in order to knowledge and emotion. Cases may occur in which the affinity between the soul and truth is so strong, that wherever the latter is present, though but in an evanescent gleam, it will leave upon the former a marvellously correct and permanent impression of itself—a sort of photographic image of a spiritual idea—and so momentary is the process, that one may easily imagine the picture to have been mysteriously evolved from within, instead of having been caught and retained from without. And just as when standing on the beach, and looking abroad upon the sea, it is difficult to regard those countless ripples which sparkle and darken in rapid alternation, as having no light in themselves, but reflecting only that which they receive, so neither is it easy to realize the fact that of all the multitudinous and many-shaded thoughts which are given off by the mind, not one, strictly speaking, comes out of it as part of itself, but is only the result of a double series of causes—unceasing movement on the part of the soul operating to alter momentarily the incidence of the truth which beams upon it, and to present to self-consciousness a change of aspect. But, so far as our

knowledge hitherto has conducted us, every class of ideas emanating from the mind of man have their corresponding objects in the outer world; or, at least, require in order to their birth, an impregnation of the innate aptitudes and spontaneous tendencies of our nature by the suggestive activity of external existences. Beyond this limit philosophy must be dismissed for conjecture, and for want of logical deduction, we must put up with a bold guess. That guess may be a happy one, or it may not—it may have hit the mark, if we could but see it, or it may not. But certainly, they who choose to resign their judgment, in so serious a matter, to a known uncertainty, and especially where all analogy is against them, with a view to escape the intellectual difficulties supposed to be inseparable from Christianity as a revelation of God, can hardly commend their example to us on the ground of philosophical caution. At any rate, we prefer to remain within the boundaries of fair argumentation—and if unable, where we are, to solve every perplexity, we deem it rational, looking at the proposed alternative, to resolve that we will

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“rather bear those ills we have,  
Than fly to others that we know not of.”

#### § 9. NO SUFFICIENT PROVISION IN THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE.

Within the circle of our own being, then, our search after that meet provision for the nourishment of man's religious powers and sensibilities which the general laws of the Divine economy warrant us in expecting, cannot terminate satisfactorily. To the intellect God has revealed himself through the medium of Nature. May he not have adopted the same system of means whereby to address the conscience and the heart? What need of a Book, when we have lying open before us the richly illustrated volume of the physical universe? The inquiry is at least a pertinent one—and as such deserves candid consideration. This it will be our sincere endeavour, at any rate, to give it—and with a view to the disposal of the point, we submit the following suggestions as intimately bearing on it.

It should be noted, we may remark, at the outset, that religious life is mainly of an emotional character. That, in human nature, which we have termed religiousness—that which capacitates man for pleasurable communion with the Eternal Spirit—that which craves, in order to its proportional development, a communication of appropriate religious ideas—consists far more largely of sensibility than of power. It is more emphatically responsive to love than to light. Knowing is less its characteristic exercise than feeling. Perfect subjective religion is perfect oneness of will between man and God—and the will, as everybody must admit, is less influenced by the conclusions of the understanding than by the affections of the heart. Not that religiousness has no need of the intellectual faculties—for how but by their aid can we become cognisant of God or of his will? But such cognisance, although absolutely necessary to religious life, is not the life itself. Goodness, for example, is not the bare perception of goodness in another, but sympathy with it. Love is not the detection of loveliness, but a grateful surrender of our being to it. Adoration is not a recounting or review of our spiritual ideas, but an indulgence of the emotions which their presence excites. Resignation is not a logical inference that resistance would be fruitless, but a concurrence in a lesser evil from attachment to a greater good. It is obviously possible enough to be at one with the Supreme on most subjects which make their appeal to the intellect, without having within us a spark of spiritual life. That the three angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles may be a truth in which the derived mind may meet the Uncreated Mind, without any conscious commingling of being. And so, over the whole expanse of objects by means of which God has expressed the relationship of one thing to another, proportion, reciprocal action, cause and effect, and so forth, it is conceivable that we shall perceive what he perceives, and, to this extent, be at one with him in knowledge, without having the smallest complacency in his will, as it respects ourselves and our destiny. Our religiousness may be left wholly untouched, and, consequently, unawakened by the intellectual coincidence of our conclusions

with his utterances—and towards him as the infinitely wise, true, righteous, and good, we may feel and exercise neither admiration, complacency, hope, love, nor joy. Now it is in our aptitude to feel these emotions in response to these ideas, that the earnest and pledge of the elevation and refinement, and permanent glory, of our being consists—and He who was pleased to endow us with this aptitude, may be said, in doing so, to have committed himself to such a manifestation of his Godhead to it, as would meet and satisfy the sensibilities he has given. It is not, therefore, to the cogitative elements only of man's complex nature, that the general laws of divine administration authorize us to anticipate a showing of the Deity, but also, and chiefly, to those sympathies, or more correctly, those capabilities of sympathy, which constitute the *substratum* of all religious life.

Now, the inquiry fairly suggests itself, whether we have in Nature such an adumbration of the Divine mind and purposes, as the case, as we have put it above, obviously demands. As a book of *instruction* to the *knowing* faculty, the physical universe, indeed, can hardly be overrated—cannot be received nor studied with too profound a gratitude. Its immensity—its endless variety—its order and regularity—the simplicity of its means, and the multiplicity of ends attained by them—its elaborate accuracy of detail—its surprisingly exact balance of forces—is it possible to have a more adequate exemplification of the intellectual infinitude of the Great Creator? On such a theme the temptation is strong to linger and expatiate—to revisit with our readers, whatever may be their views of Christianity, the scenes to which most frequent and profitable resort is made by contemplative minds—the starry heavens, the glorious ocean, the sturdy hills, the gay and laughing plains, the sad and sighing forest, the lovely garden, the grotesque cavern, and the lone wilderness—to listen reverently to what, in such dissimilar, but all impressive, tones, these have to tell us of Supreme Power and Goodness—and to pore over this pictorial representation of the Almighty, until we have attained to some not unworthy conception of his majesty and perfection. But there is the less need for this, inasmuch as they



with a view to the lightening of whose difficulties we have penned these pages, are not usually sparing in their estimate of the teaching capabilities of the volume of Nature. They point to this as precisely *the* revelation which man requires, and which, if attentively heeded, will carry up the soul to heaven, as in a chariot of fire. They are not so far wrong as some who denounce them evidently imagine. Perhaps, quite as serious a mistake has been committed by the advocates of a special revelation, in depreciating, and almost pouring contempt upon, the tuitional worth of the physical creation. We do wrong to enter this solemn temple with covered head, and to pace its aisles with unconcern or levity, and to desecrate its sanctity by gibes and taunts, as who should say, "God is not here." God *is* here—and to the worshipper whose heart has been attuned to sympathy—visibly, audibly. To such an one there is here also a Sheekinah, and the voice of an oracle, and the songs of angels, and the coming down of God to men.

But now, may it not be put with some confidence, even to those who most highly extol this mirror of the Deity, whether it has that power to awaken sensibility, which it undoubtedly has to give play to it when already awakened? The great problem which the condition of mankind submits for practical solution is, how best to draw out their affections from things temporary, perishable, and comparatively unworthy, and to beget in them hopes, fears, desires, attachments, and joys which shall occupy themselves with objects imperishable, unchanging, inexhaustible—how to attract them from the lower sphere of being in which they would continue to move, up to that higher sphere in which the more exalted attributes of their nature may have fit and delighted occupation. In a painting of Raphael's there is unquestionably an embodiment of genius capable of eliciting from the soul of man all the admiration, all the reverence, all the refined and pleasurable emotions, which genius can excite by means of art. And yet no rational person would dream that the wisest method which could be adopted with a view to reclaim sensual savageism to nobler pleasures than those arising from the gratification of animal instincts would be to place before it the cartoons of Raphael. The eye

which can see the latent spirit of those immortal works, and the sympathies which can rejoice in the triumphs of the artist, will be, the one filmed, the other dormant, in reference to everything but mere form and colour. To the great mass of mankind not very dissimilar is Nature, regarded as a revelation of God. If their religious sensibilities were already awake—if the spiritual life had already been begotten in them—if their souls were on the point of detaching themselves from the low and trivial interests of the hour, and were on the earnest look out for objects to gratify their higher instincts, and to nourish their diviner capabilities—this material universe would, no doubt, exhibit a fulness and a force of symbolic significance adequate not only for instructional, but for emotional improvement and elevation. We make no question that there have been occasional instances, and that there are still, although rare indeed, in which the Father of Spirits has looked in upon the human soul through the medium of Nature, and has won from it an inarticulate response which, rightly interpreted, would be, “Let me come to thine arms—let me rest on thy bosom—let me lose my littleness in thy greatness, and merge my will in thine!” But the question is, not what this form of divine revelation may effect in individual cases of extremely unfrequent and isolated occurrence, but what is its adaptation to the wants of the world at large. In no technical sense, but in the largest import of the term, we ask, “What is likely to be its regenerating energy upon the human race?” What it might do if we were ready to receive its instructions is not the question—but what it will do, seeing that we are *not* predisposed to listen to its voice. Looking dispassionately at things as they were prior to the times of Jesus Christ—nay, even as they now are, and glancing for a moment at what requires to be done, have we anything approaching to a reasonable assurance that the display of the Supreme in his works is competent to achieve the necessary revolution? Or, to put the inquiry still more pointedly—have we sufficient warrant in reason for believing that He who endowed us with a religious nature, and made it the supreme element of our being and constitution, has provided for its quickening, development, and

gratification, no other embodiment of what it needs, but such as we find in the physical universe ?

§ 10. NECESSARY LIMITATIONS OF A REVELATION THROUGH NATURE.

We affirm our unhesitating conviction that we have no such warrant—not in the obvious fitness of the agency under notice—not in the general experience of mankind. Between the power and the emergency there is no exact correspondence—no nice adaptation of the instrument to its work. These material objects which, on the hypothesis of sceptics, have an exclusive commission from God to address themselves to our spiritual being, begin by taking firm hold upon our animal instincts and appetites. When we are most impressible, when our minds are most inquisitive, and our affections most readily engaged, the Book of Nature exhibits no aptitude to give prominence to those religious ideas which are of the highest moment to us. The sympathies which it is irresistible to awaken, the desires which it stimulates, the aspirations which it evokes, are such as have no tendency in themselves to put us into closer contact with the spiritual world. It is far more successful in persuading us to love its illustrations for what they are, than for what they represent. The first we can do without effort—we cannot help doing it—the second demands no little ratiocinative exertion. The delegate eclipses the principal. That which should lead us to a better home, detains us too contentedly where it finds us. Are we, then, to blame it as unworthy of its Author? Assuredly not! But we may surmise most justly that if it is not only unapt to school us in those sentiments which it is the prime end of our existence to form and entertain, but, at least in our earlier and more docile years, exerts a powerful influence in precisely the opposite direction—if it is long before it raises one thought of God, but ready enough in raising thoughts of ourselves—if it is more potent to urge us on to self-indulgence than to goodness, to acquisition than to impartation, to the enjoyments of sense than those of spiritual purity, to the pursuit of this life than to discipline for another, to rest upon itself for happiness rather than upon its Lord—we may surmise, we repeat, with some show of



reason, that this cannot be the sole nor the chief provision made by him, to attract humanity from a low position, and raise it up to blessed and unending communion with himself. Granted that, as reason strengthens, Nature discourses to us of worthier themes, it must be also borne in mind that she does not this in the same resistless manner, nor with the same all-conquering charm. What she has to make known of Him, she discloses by way, not of direct assertion, if we may so express ourselves, as of indirect and unauthoritative inference. We see, we feel, we are taken captive by her teachings in regard to very much, if not all, that affects our inferior elements of being—we have to reason out by slow and painful steps of logic those of her lessons which are adapted to give expansion to the superior. The first we learn of her as the child does of its mother, when, sitting at her feet, it is instructed in the use of its playthings, or when looking into her eyes, it would read an invitation to get up and be kissed. But the last we spell out of her, as might that same child, when bidden to put aside its toys, and con over maxims of virtue from its primer. Nor can there be a moment's doubt, that this revelation of divine things to the reasoning faculty instead of to the instincts, to the deductions and inferences of the understanding instead of to the intuitive glance of the affections, and as the end of a purely intellectual process rather than as the fruition of a natural desire, is sure to be cold, even if ever so clear. It is so. The mind which sees God in the mirror of his creation, and knows nothing of him as elsewhere displayed, sees but a bare outline, correct, it may be, but not lifelike. The image is shadowy and vague—an allegorical representation of a Power, not the portrait of a Person. There is infinity—there is wisdom—there is might—there is goodness—but they are all abstract. We may connect them one with another, and so get an idea of unity—but we get at nothing about which our affections may fling their arms in gratitude and confidence. Such emotions as are excited in our bosoms by the contemplation of Nature, in her great, beneficent, and beautiful processes, very much resemble in kind the feelings with which we witness the achievements of the wonder-working steam-engine. We admire—we ap-



prove—we might almost fancy that we love—but if questioned, it would be impossible to say what the dreamy entity is which has this effect upon us. Mere mechanism, on however grand a scale, however elaborately contrived, however exquisitely finished, and however beneficial to us in its working, can never express to human hearts, that which human hearts are especially formed to feel. From it we may learn much, very much, of its inventor—but nothing which particularly interests our sensibilities. We gain no little knowledge of Watt from his steam-engine—but it is his biography which exerts over our affections a sympathetic power. Now the material universe is but machinery in action—sublime in the simplicity of its principle, immeasurable in its magnitude, infinitely intricate in its multiplicity of details, exquisitely graceful and finished in its processes, and, beyond all our power of estimate, beneficial in its results. It can, it should, and it does, teach us much of its Author, without which we could feel no just appreciation of his glorious perfection—but, unless in rare cases of peculiar spiritual sensitiveness, it cannot move us to love him. Thus shadowed forth, he comes not within range of our affectionate sympathies—he answers not to the cravings of our hearts. We could have formed no adequate conception of him apart from this embodiment of his wisdom, power, and goodness—but alone, and of itself, it is not the revelation of him in which we can rest satisfied.

A familiar illustration may help us to see this matter in a yet clearer light. We shall imagine a band of paupers placed by the benevolence of some unknown individual in a spacious mansion, fitted up in all respects with an evident eye to their comfort. We shall suppose them so far vested with a proprietary right in the building and its surrounding estate, that they are free to use the whole for their own accommodation without pecuniary payment. The yearly repairs and redeceptions are done by servants of the gentleman who has chosen this method of gratifying a kindly disposition, and everything necessary to quiet enjoyment which cannot be obtained by labour on the estate, is regularly supplied by the same unknown hand. It is obvious that these poor dependent people might

learn much of their benefactor from what he has done and is doing for them—and that all traces of his careful forethought, of his desire to meet reasonable wishes, of his minute attention to details, of his skill in expedients, and of his regardlessness of expense in carrying out his designs, might, if observed, excite towards him a feeling of respect, admiration, and, perhaps, gratitude. But if it were his object to gain their hearts—to develop in them, in order to their own happiness, a pure and powerful affection for himself capable of elevating and refining their coarse minds—he would be obliged to resort to further means. To their apprehension he is as yet but a vague and splendid idea, too like a vision of their dreams, too impalpable and evasive, to allow of the satisfying repose of their whole emotional being upon himself. He has never yet come within the circle of their sympathies, and there needs a closer contact between him and them to prevail upon them to quit themselves as the centre of their fondest passions, and to find that centre in him. But now suppose him to emerge from his previously studied concealment, to spend a short interval in their midst, living as they lived, conversing with them over their affairs, and displaying towards them a tender and affectionate solicitude—why, thereafter, the place he would hold in their hearts, and the emotions he would excite in them, would be altogether different, not merely in measure, but in kind, to what they had been before. The personal visit would have been fruitless, without the previous exhibition of munificence, just as that munificence would have fallen short of the purpose without the visit. Each was equally necessary to the end supposed—the first to store up the materials which the last, like an electric flash, was needed to fire.

God's revelation of himself to us by means of the objects and processes of the physical universe, is not to be regarded in the light of an experiment which has been tried and failed—but as a preliminary educational preparation of our sensibilities to fit them for yielding a due response when afterwards subjected to a closer and directer appeal. If ever they were to be spoken to in a language which they could understand, and in such manner as to ensure their ready and glad concurrence, it

was obviously requisite that they should be able to identify that address to them with a Being whose known qualities and excellence would give to it its characteristic significance and force. If it were a part of the Creator's design to draw nigher to man with a view to engage his trust and love, it was important that there should already exist some ideas of the Creator, his greatness, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, in order to an appreciation of this more intimate approach. For it is not by the drawing nigh alone that the character of the emotion which follows will be formed, but also by the known *status* and attributes of the Being who deigns to vouchsafe his nearer presence. The effect upon our hearts of a kindly and disinterested solicitation of our love by a fellow-being, would be much the same whether it were made by a peasant or a prince, if we knew nothing of the position of either. But if we had reason to know that the solicitation really came from a royal personage—say from Queen Victoria of England—then would the fulness, the depth, and the entire peculiarity of our affectionate response, be modified by our previous knowledge of the Sovereign. All that we had before learned of the extent of her dominions, the leading features of her character, and the influence and resources at the command of her will, would enter into and colour the fond attachment to her which her own unexpected familiarity might excite. Love takes the hue of the object on which it reposes. The love of God when kindled will be necessarily congenerous, to use a phrase of the old divines, with the ideas of God which have possession of our minds. The book of Nature discloses to us a vast field of knowledge in regard to him, the previous study of which, although, as we have seen, it is powerless to *awaken* the emotions which so largely constitute the religiousness of human nature, is absolutely requisite to give a suitable tone to those emotions. If, therefore, it be true, as we are attempting to show, that the spiritual sensibilities with which man has been endowed by the Creator, and the unsuitableness and incompetency of his display of himself through nature to call them forth into active exercise and development, should lead us to anticipate a further and a closer revelation, it does not follow that the last is



consequent upon the failure of the first, but rather that the first was required in order to the completeness and power of the last. We are merely conducted over the estate prior to our being introduced to the proprietor.

§ 11. EXPERIENCE OF MANKIND AS TO THE INSUFFICIENCY  
ALLUDED TO.

That a further adumbration of himself to man, different in kind, and much more intimate, much more nearly assimilated to their emotional aptitudes, really was necessary in order to oneness of will between the Creator and his creatures, may be collected, not only from the nature of the case, but also from the common experience of mankind. The order and processes of the physical universe have never, in point of fact, met and satisfied the cravings of the religious sentiment after a manifested God. The belief, wherever it may have obtained, that beyond and behind these processes, shrouded in impenetrable mystery, the Great Spirit who superintends them maintained an independent and eternal existence, and that in Him centered all conceivable perfections, never could, and never did, beget the emotions which could delightedly pour themselves forth in worship, express themselves in piety, or raise the human spirit into pleased communion with the Supreme. The vagueness was evermore felt to be too great for sympathy. There was a perpetual yearning after a distincter personality. All ancient mythology is an exemplification of this, and illustrates the irresistible tendency of the religious sentiment to clothe its ideas in a form adapted to emotional recognition and converse. Indeed, in every age, and in every country, we may discover the distinct traces of effort on the part of humanity, to bring the Highest within range of the heart's action. And this effort may properly and philosophically be regarded as the practical testimony of our constitution to the reality and nature of its wants—inarticulate cries, and unutterable groanings from the deep bosom of manhood after an embodiment of the Deity palpable to its strong affections. What wonder that, only half informed, and swayed chiefly by the more sensual passions, it crowded Olympus with Gods and goddesses.



representative of nothing better than human propensities elevated to superhuman power? What wonder that the reflex action of such a theogony upon the nations which adopted it, should pervert and deaden their spiritual sensibilities? "Like priest, like people," is only another form of the moral law, "Like God, like worshippers." Let the most zealous advocate of the sufficiency of natural revelation point to any one people on the face of the earth in which, abandoned wholly to its influence, man's religiousness has not allegorized, humanized, or even brutified the powers and processes of Nature to supply himself with the object of worship. What mattered it to the mass, anterior to the coming of Christ, that here and there a man of penetrating insight should get cognizance, and make proclamation, of truths relating to the Invisible so far above the ideas commonly entertained in his own day, as to suggest the belief that he must have received them from inspiration? Clear enough it is, that the light did not enkindle love. Those notions of the ancient philosophers respecting God and the soul which are often appealed to as proof that a further revelation was needless, exerted no moral power upon the people—very little even upon the wise men who uttered them. There was evidently needed a somewhat capable of breathing the breath of religious life into the dead. Nothing stirred—no pulse was quickened—no heart was taken captive—no trust was conciliated and engaged—by the weightiest and worthiest discoveries made by human reason in the investigation *quoad sacra* of the material universe. They never took the shape which would constitute them a power with the religious affections. The spiritual life of humanity seemed to have departed. There was nothing within reach of men able with authority to recall it. Adopting with slight modification the sublime language of the Apostle Paul, we may truly say, "The whole creation groaned and travailed in pain until then—waiting for the adoption."

§ 12. ADAPTATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE CRAVINGS OF THE  
RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

Into this gloomy and apparently hopeless scene of spiritual

desolation and death, we are now to witness the introduction of a vivifying force. Christ appeared, and forthwith there was life. The phenomena that followed we have already had under consideration. Now, is there any such adaptation of the Christian faith to what we have shown to be the otherwise unappeasable yearnings of man's religiousness, as will account for the rapidity, the extent, the permanence, and the future promise, of the spiritual revolution it produced? We believe there is. We shall proceed to point it out—and we shall afterwards inquire what intellectual objection there is to bar the conclusion, that He who formed in our hearts an inextinguishable desire after some manifestation of himself to our moral and spiritual sympathies can be none other than the Being who, in Christianity, corresponds in the kind, character, and purpose of his manifestation, with the scope of that desire.

It will be admitted, we imagine, by all who have given serious attention to the subject, that the writings, which together we designate the New Testament, constitute Jesus of Nazareth the key-stone of the system of faith which is inscribed with his name. They set him before us not merely as a spiritual teacher, who possessed a deeper insight into truths relating to God and the human soul than any foregoing prophet, but as "God manifest in the flesh." His life, his miracles, his labours, his trials, his sufferings, his death, are treated, not as the setting of his doctrine, but as the very sum and substance of the truth taught. We are introduced to him there, not as one who told us what we did not know before, but as one whose person and history are the outward form and showing of that which he came to tell. "He is the way, the truth, and the life," therein differing essentially from those who only point it out. He requires of his disciples not so much that they should credit his sayings, as that they should believe on *him*. Everything in his hands assumes a personal shape—everything in the hands of those apostles who professed to interpret him to the world, derives its significance from its connexion with him, personally considered. He is, in some peculiar and emphatic sense, the Son of God. His death is the secret of our life. He and his Father are

one. To see him is to see the Father—for he is the image of the invisible God—"the brightness of his father's glory," in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Now, making every allowance for oriental hyperbolisms, it is sheer vanity to attempt an explanation of all this, on the hypothesis that Jesus Christ looked upon himself, and was looked upon by his immediate followers, as no more than an eminent religious teacher. No man, probably, unencumbered with a philosophy which he wishes to reconcile with the reputed facts and doctrines of Holy Writ, would rise from a candid perusal of the New Testament without confessing that, whatever human reason may say to it, the writers of that book plainly intended that men should look up to Jesus Christ, as the human expression of the Eternal Spirit. Not, indeed, that we are bound to take all the theological dogmatism which has been uttered on this theme, as warranted by the representations of it in Scripture—but that, unless we are justified in explaining away certain phrases as may best suit our preconceived notions, and in doing obvious violence to the drift and spirit of the entire volume, we are bound to regard the peculiar mission of Christianity, as explained by itself, to be the revelation of the Divine mind and purpose through the medium of a human life and history.

If this be a true account of the obvious and explicit purport of the gospel of Christ—and, to say the least, this account requires us to put no strain on the tenour of the records—then Christianity presents itself to us in this wise—It is a translation of the idea of God into a language intelligible to the religious sensibilities of man. The works of creation interpret him to the intellectual powers—the life of Christ, to the moral sympathies. The action of physical mechanism supplies the alphabet in the one case—of moral mechanism, in the other. Logic is for the understanding—love is for the heart. And truly, the plan, on the first blush of it, appears to be well suited to our nature and its wants. Our religious constitution, partaking far more largely, as we have seen, of the emotional than of the ratiocinative element, demands, in order to its full development, an emotional representation to it of the objects



with which it was designed to be conversant. Can we conceive of this demand being met in any other way, equally efficacious, than by the showing them to us in a human form and dress? The abstract truths expressive of divine excellences are powerless in themselves to kindle our affections or to govern our will. How can they be best embodied so as that we may choose them as our companions for daily converse, our guardians and our guides for confiding consultation, our ministering angels in our hours of sorrow, our heart's portion for time and for eternity? In what accents can our sense of guilt—a sense which no ingenious reasonings of ours can wholly extinguish—be spoken unto, so as that all gloomy anxieties shall give place to a quiet and abiding peace of conscience? How can those our obligations to the Author of our being be so presented to our will, as to secure not only its constrained acquiescence in their propriety, but its delighted recognition of, and passionate surrender to, their claims? If it be the benign purpose of the Supreme to allure us to that higher sphere of being, activity, and enjoyment, in which our noblest capabilities may have full scope for exercise and satisfaction, how better could he do it than by putting his truth, his purity, his love, his will and purpose concerning us, into the shape of a man's history crowded with passages which come right home to our inmost and tenderest sympathies? What are the chief, the all-but irresistible, instrumentalities by which heart moves heart? How, usually, are strong wills bowed, and violent prejudices soothed to sleep, and fierce enmities overborne and slain? By the numerous expressions and acts in which disinterested kindness will dress itself—by magnanimous self-sacrifice, by cheerful exposure to wrong, by meek forbearance under wrong, by the helping hand when help is needed, by the silent tear of commiseration when suffering is endured, by heroic enterprise for others' benefit, by long and unwearied consistency in pursuit of benevolent ends. These are charmed agencies all the world over. These have ever been found, and will ever continue to be, "the cords of love and the bands of a man" the most potent to draw the will of humanity whithersoever he would who wields them. There is scarcely a depth of degra-



dation to which we can sink from which these might not drag us—scarcely an eminence of virtue within the possibility of man's attainment, to which these might not lead us on. Well, it is precisely by this class of agencies that Christianity professes to reveal to our moral nature the All-wise God, otherwise invisible to it, or, at best, but "dimly seen." And hence, the convergence of all the lines of light in the person of Jesus Christ—hence the intensely personal character of the entire system—hence, the earnest and reiterated direction of faith, hope, and love, to him, rather than to his oral utterances. What he discoursed of God is not referred to as the principal medium by which he imaged the Deity to man's heart—but rather what he *was*, what he did, what he suffered—his purity, his all-comprehensive benevolence, his heroic self-sacrifice, his tenderness, his meekness. Herein we are instructed to look for the manifested God—to attain to the truest understanding of what he is morally—what are his regards to us—whither he would lead us—and how deep and moving is his love to us. Here affection displays itself with a view to excite affection—the appeal to moral sympathy is made by a previous exhibition of moral sympathy—and in the natural language of human deeds, struggles, tears, distresses, death, we have translated to us the else unutterable thoughts, propensions and will of the ever-blessed God.

#### § 13. NOT REPUGNANT TO REASON.

Such appears to us to be the simple and obvious scope of the Christian faith, and such, in substance, has been the view of it taken by the majority of those who have responded to it as a revelation of God. In substance, we say—for although they might choose to describe it in very different terms, and unwittingly conceal its moral loveliness behind a stiff veil of technical theology, it will be found by any one who will look beneath the surface of mere words and formulæ, that this is the spirit and essence of their variously modelled creeds—namely, God in Christ the source of spiritual life to men. Calmly considered, is there anything shocking to the reason in any such dispensation as we have just represented the gospel to be? Is

it more surprising, is it less credible, in the nature of things, that God should offer himself to our contemplation through a purely moral medium, than that he should limit his disclosures to man of what he is, and what he wills, to a medium almost exclusively physical? Are we bound to conclude that He who has made himself partially visible to us by means of material laws, cannot effect the end still more completely by means of a human life? Nay more! Is it conceivable that moral sympathies should be awakened and engaged by any other than a moral manifestation of the Deity? The order of Nature, the regularity of her movements, the unerring certainty of her processes, the variety of her aspects, and all the other distinctive qualities which may be predicated of her, are not for their own sakes, nor merely for the material advantages which God's creatures of all orders may derive from them. They have a two-fold mission to perform—immediate and remote—for each, while it has something to do, has some information also to impart to us in the mode of doing it. In more senses than one is Earth our mother—in higher senses than in that commonly received. Out of her we spring and from her we derive nourishment, but her kind offices are not confined to these physical results. She teaches, as well as supports—breathes instruction into the mind, as well as provides subsistence for the body. Earth is our first governess, and very aptly fulfils her duties. By progressive lessons she leads on young intelligence from the simplest to the sublimest knowledge—ever revealing, yet ever leaving unrevealed still more than she has taught. She is herself the embodiment of Infinite thought—the Eternal mind made visible. No man objects to such a statement as the above, that it is beneath the Almighty to illustrate his own nature and glory by means of mere mechanism. But, then, if it be fitting to instruct mankind by such means, does it not seem quite as becoming to the Supreme Wisdom that he should illustrate himself by something higher than mechanism, and intrinsically nobler than merely material laws and processes? If God may show himself to our intellect in a plant or an animal, in the *strata* of the earth's crust, or in the flash of a magnetic current, why not also to our hearts, in a man's history

from the cradle to the grave?—why not, in the moral conflict of a man with all the powers of evil with which human life is environed? The objection felt, after all, is not the revelation of Deity through humanity—for the most sceptical will accept the *race* as a mirror in which some reflection of the Eternal may be discerned. But if He may be regarded, without any jar upon the reason, as choosing to shine through so confessedly imperfect and impure a moral medium as that presented by the whole family of man, what is there to which reason need take exception, in his selecting an individual person, life, and history, not spoiled by imperfection, not tainted with impurity, through which to bless us with the clearest expression of his own divine character and purpose? We can discern, we confess, no *moral* difficulty in the case.

#### § 14. SPECIAL ADVANTAGES SECURED BY THIS FORM OF REVELATION.

But we can see some advantages gained—perhaps without presuming too far, we may add—some necessities in man's condition met, by this method of shadowing forth to him "the unknown God." The education of that religious sentiment with which we are endowed, for which all analogy leads us to infer that adequate provision has been made, requires that there should be turned towards it, by whatever fitting expedient, some impressive representation of the Divine character in its moral aspect—that is, in its relation to truth, righteousness, sin, obedience, mercy, government. It is in entire harmony of will between us and the Supreme in respect of these ideas, that the repose and satisfaction of our higher nature must needs consist, just as physical health and enjoyment are identified with a like oneness of will in regard to natural laws. It is consequently of the utmost importance that we should be furnished with some objective embodiment of the view taken of these things by the Divine mind. To say the least, these are subjects on which any authorized communication to us of God's judgment and purposes in relation to them, made in a shape that shall be vividly intelligible, would tend mightily to assist the development of our spiritual capabilities. But all these ideas are inseparably associated with *action*—and by means of



action only can be competently expressed. As illustrative of our meaning, we call attention to the methods resorted to by ourselves for clothing abstractions of a similar kind in a dress suited to our powers of apprehension. We wish, for instance, to excite certain emotions in the bosom in connexion with ambition, generosity, vindictiveness, or patience. We wish to place these qualities of human feeling and conduct in a strong light with a view to influence the will. We *may* discourse of them—but our discourse, to produce any powerful effect, must be well seasoned with historical exemplifications. We may represent them in statuary, in painting, in music—but our representation of them by these arts, limits the view of them to a single moment of their active manifestation. We all feel that the end we desire can only be fully compassed by the drama—in which abstract qualities may be made not merely to assume concrete forms, but pass through all the various conditions of external incident which will make them palpable to us in their very exercise. Now, we submit, that the religious ideas, such as truth, righteousness, sin, obedience, government, and the like, require to be exhibited to us by some analogous method—that the eloquence, the poetry, the sculpture, the painting, the music, of the physical world, are incompetent to express these ideas in their relation to God, as our moral nature needs them to be expressed—that we must have them *dramatised* to us, or, in other words, shown in connexion with actual scenes, conflicts, trials, enterprises, defeats, victories, which will bring fully out to our apprehension, and to our affections, these several ideas in their *action*. The vivifying and educational power over our spiritual sensibilities of any such representation would seem to render essential these two conditions—first, that the series of events and the life by which the abstract qualities are to be set forth, should be thoroughly human—and secondly, that the whole drama, so to speak, should bear upon it the unmistakeable stamp of the Divine sanction, and satisfy us that they portray in their action the mind and will of God. Now, assuming for a moment that the Christian records are trustworthy, we contend that the mode in which God is therein professedly revealed to our religious



faculties and emotions, fulfils both these conditions, and, in so far, precisely answers to our moral wants. It puts just those ideas with which we need to become conversant, in order to spiritual life, into the shape which their very nature and our constitution seem to require that they should be put. It constitutes an apt, and, in our sober judgment, the *only* apt body for the due expression of the spirit whereof the ideas alluded to are component elements. It is an exposition of spiritual principles in the dramatic form, in which, however, the action and the actors are not mimic, but real.

Let us briefly advert to another advantage gained, another necessity met, by this mode of addressing the religious sentiment. We have already said enough to show that mankind needed not so much a directive as a suasive revelation of God's will. "For the good that I would I do not—but the evil that I would not that I do," describes the common experience of our race—the experience alike of Jew and Gentile.

"Video meliora, proboque,  
Deteriora sequor,"

is the well-known and oft-quoted passage of the Latin poet, expressive of precisely the same truth. Now it is a special characteristic of the manifestation of God in Christ, as given us in the New Testament, that its leading design is, not so much to instruct our race in duties, as to supply a motive for their performance. It is not a lecture on "the life of God in the soul of man," but an influence to quicken it—begets a sense of obligation rather than informs it—and undertakes that achievement without which the best preceptive teaching is useless, namely to breathe life into the dead. "*Si vis me flere, flendum est*," is the law of moral power which Christianity exemplifies. It does not argue the duty of weeping, but it weeps to make us weep. It is human to win human sympathies. And truly "we men have a mysterious, a fearful hold one upon another. When through the ordinary means of communication, soul meets soul, it is wonderful how strength of purpose in the one, can obtain for itself a perfect mastery over the other. Those outward signs of earnestness, and deep emotion

of which the body is capable, how impossible is it for us to discern them without being ourselves stirred. Man commending to his fellow-man a great moral truth, with which his own soul has become identified, and with which he would fain identify the souls of others, radiates persuasiveness from every part of his frame. The solemn import of his message invests him with an unwonted air of dignity, and throws upon that countenance of his, upon which we may have often looked with utter indifference, a kind of preternatural majesty. The swell and subsidence of his muscles with the tide of feeling which flows and ebbs within him—the heaving of his chest as if panting under the weight of the theme upon which he discourses—the varying shades of colour that pass over his face in rapid alternation, vague but yet visible images of the thoughts which are driving through the expanse of his soul—the inexplicable language of those eyes through which his heart looks mournfully, wistfully, proudly, reproachfully, wooingly, and, in every instance, is understood—the tones of that voice, in which every pulsation of the sympathies is rendered audible, and all the movements of the inner man disclose themselves in music—these outward translations of thought, emotion, and purpose, are never read by man without awakening, more or less, his sensibilities, and leaving, more or less distinctly, some copy of their meaning upon his mind. A finger-post may answer for mere guidance—the most arbitrary symbols may serve the understanding for instruction—but would you gain over to any truth man’s will, man’s heart, man’s self, that truth must be introduced and recommended to him by a visible and intimate companionship with humanity.”\* Christianity has plainly associated with the spiritual truths it would commend to the heart of mankind the same kind of magnetic power which is described in the foregoing extract—and, we conclude, for the same purpose. Its mission is to win the will for God, and it approaches man under a guise eminently adapted to accomplish that object. It selects the incidents of a human history, and the workings of a human soul, as offering a far fitter sphere for the display of

\* Miall’s “British Churches,” &c. London : Hall, Virtue, & Co.

what it behoves us to know and to feel respecting the moral bearings of the Divine character, than that supplied by the objects and processes of the material universe. And hence its peculiar power to move. The medium of alleged communication between heaven and earth in this case being mind, not matter, spirit rather than body, we get, as the consequence, not outline merely, but colour—a portrait through all the animate features of which the Father of Spirits looks into the very depths of our souls and awakens fellowship. There is an obvious advantage, therefore, in this method of revelation which is peculiar to itself, and which unquestionably adapts it to exert just that kind of influence over man's religious nature which it must be admitted specially to require.

Lastly, this assumed presentation to us of the Godhead through humanity, with a view to the awakening and development of our spiritual capabilities, answers well to the circumstances of the vast majority of mankind, and consists well with the avowed aim of Christianity to bring under subjection to itself the entire human family. If, indeed, we are compelled by the construction of our minds, and by the arrangements of the Creator made with a view to it, to reason out all our religious ideas from the premises supplied us by natural laws and phenomena, the mass of us are in a hopeless position for the expansion of our spiritual nature. There is needed in order to this result a much higher style of preparatory intellectual culture than ninety-nine in a hundred ordinarily receive. Such a revelation would be practically a gospel for philosophers only—scarcely would it be “glad tidings for the poor.” Its very alphabet, like the Chinese, would demand a more extensive study than the leisure of this work-a-day world will allow to many. They who stand most in need for time, at least, of the compensating supports and elevating pleasures yielded by communion with God—they who toil hard for a scanty temporal subsistence, and have within reach but few means and facilities for the acquisition of knowledge—they whose souls are so crowded round by the exacting duties of every day, that if ever won to religious hope, and trust, and love, they must be won by a kind of *coup de*



*main*—cannot be expected to nourish their spiritual sympathies with dry abstract truths, or hard logical deductions. Pictures will suit them much better than spelling-books. But if it be true, as Shakespeare grandly says, that “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin”—if in the heaviest press of business, and under the worst educational disadvantages, and with almost no prior intellectual training, heart can make itself well understood by heart in that unwritten but most expressive language to which strong emotions will always prefer to resort—if even among savages a living exemplification of a moral principle can make itself not only intelligible but impressive—surely it is of no slight moment that those divine communications to us which so vitally concern our religious wellbeing, should be conveyed in a form suited to the disabilities of the multitude, and should be flashed rather than filtered into the souls of men. It is certainly a recommendation of Christianity, aspiring as it does to invite the whole race of man to its arms, that it has couched that invitation in symbols which our spiritual sensibilities can readily interpret without any long process of previous schooling—and that it exhibits all the primary religious ideas in moving illustrations which the most unlettered, the least informed, and the wholly unskilled in ratiocination, *may* see and appreciate.

Even intellectually judged of, therefore, the personal and human display of the ever-blessed God, which the gospel of Jesus Christ professedly presents to our religiousness, with a view to awaken in us spiritual faith, love, and joy, is capable of vindication. It was needed: for no other conceivable medium of revelation corresponds with the whole extent of human want—it is open to no objection, which, if valid, does not apply with even greater force to other media of divine communication to man—and it specially meets some of the necessities of our moral position, thereby acquiring advantages which any dispensation differing from it in kind would unquestionably lack. All this, even if admitted, will not, it is true, *prove* Christianity to be a revelation of God—nor have the foregoing observations been thrown together for any such purpose. But this we have attempted to establish, and, we hope, to some extent we



have succeeded—that the Christian faith, viewed from the right stand-point, is not fairly open, as a manifestation to man of the unseen God, to any preliminary protest of our reason fatal to its high and holy claims. There is nothing properly unphilosophical involved in the idea either of its end, or its constitutional structure. It exhibits many aspects of moral fitness. It is quite borne out by general analogy—and hence, if the old evidences in favour of its divine origin which were wont to pass as sufficient some twenty years back, have not been destroyed, their pertinence and force are certainly not set aside by the more subtle and sweeping conclusions of modern intellectual scepticism. But, not to “stretch ourselves beyond our measure,” we shall endeavour to condense the foregoing dissertation into a single paragraph, make on it a general observation or two, and pass on to a still higher question now awaiting us.

§ 15. SUMMARY OF THE PRECEDING OBSERVATIONS.

It is a fact, then, which will not admit of dispute, that man is endowed with a capacity to entertain religious ideas, and to be swayed by religious emotions and affections—or, in other words, that he possesses a nature adapted to receive the highest order of happiness from the perception and appreciation of spiritual truth. It is a fact that wherever this capacity is fairly developed, it assumes, as of right, the post of supremacy over our whole being, and gives law, and sets limits, and supplies motives, to all other powers and passions as subordinate to itself. And it is a fact that, throughout the Divine dominions, the existence of a capacity always implies some external provision meet for its exercise, growth, and gratification. It is fair to conclude that what we have designated man’s religiousness, will offer no exception to the rule—more especially as it is obviously intended to govern him in all the other aspects of his nature. As there is light, colour, and form for the eye, objects of beauty for taste, and exact truth for the pure intellect, so there must be somewhere embodied such manifestations of God as may serve to elicit, to occupy, and to reward, this noblest endowment of humanity. No such provision can be

discovered within the circle of man's own being. No sufficient provision is made for it in the objects and processes of the physical universe. For, the capacity of which we speak is mainly emotional, and Nature, which is mere mechanism, is incompetent to express, with the requisite precision, fulness, and power, the moral views of God's being, character, and purposes, which the case demands: and this inadequacy is proved by the experience of mankind in every age of the world. That there is a revelation of God by means of his works, and that it is essential to any suitable apprehension of him, is undeniable—but that it is complete, and covers the entire want of man, in regard to his religious powers and sensibilities, is disproved by both reason and fact. Analogy, therefore, would lead us to expect some other display of the Divine mind and will, and that it should be made through a medium specially adapting it to that emotional side of human religiousness, which no adumbration of himself in material mechanism could closely and impressively approach. Thus only could the complement of revelation be complete—and thus the two modes of manifestation would place within reach of man an ample external provision commensurate with the wants of his spiritual being. Christianity presents itself to us as fulfilling the expectations raised by analogy—as meeting and satisfying the demand for which nature had no appropriate answer. Its professions and its obvious purport precisely hit the want. It seeks to kindle love by a disclosure of love. It aims at awakening sympathy, and gaining the will, by exhibiting the religious ideas in association with a person, a life, scenes, incidents, deeds, and sufferings, eminently fitted to commend them to sympathy, and to exercise influence upon the will. It is a moral medium of a moral manifestation, and being designed for man, it is itself human. It approaches us in a guise which our emotional nature can most readily apprehend, and most earnestly respond to—and it undertakes to show us that of God which we most need and desire to know—his moral relationship to ourselves. Now if we can identify these professions with fact—if we can satisfy ourselves that Jesus Christ is, in the view of a soberly exercised judgment,

“the image of the invisible”—if, in a word, the general result of Christianity upon the mind and heart, harmonizes with what we elsewhere gather to become the Deity to produce—then, we affirm, the *special mode* by which Christianity seeks to compass it, so far from being objectionable to our highest reason is in perfect keeping with the anticipations which it is justified in indulging, is congruous with all the analogies of Divine procedure, and cannot therefore, on general grounds, be excepted against as doing violence to man’s intellectual conclusions. We will not press the argument further than this. But we do say, with some confidence, that the foregoing considerations fairly sweep the field of the intellectual difficulties preliminary to the discussion of the question, Whether Christianity as embalmed in the New Testament writings, is, what it assumes to be, a showing to us of Deity through humanity, or whether it is a sort of chance-medley production of fanaticism, falsehood, and fortune. No man, we think, has a right to step in and say, that before the inquiry is undertaken as to the facts, there is a previous question to be disposed of, as to the philosophy which the facts, if received as authentic, would manifestly involve—at least, no man has a right to do this until the fallacy of the foregoing argument has been demonstrated. Take the right stand-point—that from which the pretensions of the Christian faith must needs be surveyed, in order to a rational judgment of its merits—and we venture to deny that it presents itself under any such aspect as should preclude further examination—and to affirm that a further examination may reasonably be prosecuted with an intellectual bias, in favour of, rather than in opposition to, the conclusion that it comes from God.

#### § 16. DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTIC OF CHRISTIANITY AS A REVELATION.

If the foregoing observations are well founded, there can be no hesitation of belief as to what constitutes the special and distinctive characteristic of Christianity as a professed revelation of God. It is a disclosure of the moral aspect of the Divine Being, both as to his attributes and his will, so far, at



least, as it can affect man's interests and destiny, *through the medium of a human personage and life*. It has been called a book-revelation—and it is frequently disparaged as such. It is no such thing—indeed, nothing, as it appears to us, but a preposterously shallow view of the whole subject could have so egregiously blundered upon this description of it. With just as much propriety might the ocean, in which the Creator has gloriously mirrored his immensity and his power, be styled a salt water revelation of the Unseen. The book no more defines the mode of the display in the one case, than salt water does in the other. Possibly had any superficial, but over-zealous advocate of the Christian faith adopted this method of depreciating the ocean as the glass of the Invisible, he would have been severely rebuked, and very justly too, for a stolid dulness of apprehension in regard to the spirit of things material, or, more likely, for that intemperance of affection for a supernatural system which blinds the eyes of reason to the outspread volume of nature. Is there not a possibility of fanaticism on the sceptical side? And may not even acute minds under its influence, be led into marvellously childish and silly mistakes? A book-revelation! As if the supreme Ruler of the universe (such is the implied sarcasm of the phrase) had no better way of showing himself to mankind, than getting his nature and perfections written about under his own immediate superintendence! But what? Is all history, then, to be regarded as a mere book description of mankind? Surely, the great and the good of our race, from the time of Moses downwards, have illustrated the high capabilities of humanity, and its generous or heroic virtues, in those deeds and trials, in those struggles and victories, of theirs, for which their names are yet illustrious in the annals of the world, and will evermore continue to be so. And because the record of these acts and sufferings was kept on parchment for the benefit of all succeeding generations, are we to cast contempt upon history as but a parchment exhibition of what man is and can do? Should we venture, on any other subject but Christianity, and in the name of intellectual philosophy, moreover, to set down as the descriptive and discriminating quality of the historical development of humanity, that



it is one made by means of paper and print? And if not, why is Christianity to be thus misdescribed? Why is this slur to be cast on its character, and by men who pass for the disciples of pure reason? The New Testament is a book-revelation of God in the same sense as Carlyle's *Speeches and Letters of Oliver Cromwell* is a book-revelation of Puritanism—in the same sense as a glass case filled with ancient manuscripts is a revelation of the old world to modern times. It is merely the mechanical contrivance by means of which the series of facts wherein God is said to have displayed himself to our spiritual apprehensions and sensibilities was preserved from oblivion, That from which we learn God—that in which we discern him—that in which his love invites and wins ours—is a life, not a book—such a strangely original, such a morally impressive, life, and so radiant of divinity, that even scepticism itself (save where it is associated with an overgrown and disproportionately developed reasoning faculty which has choked all veneration) is compelled to stand uncovered in its presence. But we restrain ourselves. Our plan will oblige us to consider at some length, hereafter, the part assigned to the mere record, in this assumed manifestation of the Deity. Meanwhile, however, it behoves the reader to bear in mind that the special characteristic of the faith now under examination is that described by its noblest exponent as “God manifest in the flesh.”

§ 17. INCOMPLETENESS AND PARTIALITY OF ITS SUCCESS  
CONSIDERED.

The above train of reasoning, it may be more plausibly objected, however consistent and convincing in the shape of theory, is not thoroughly borne out by the facts of the case. If, as has been contended for, the gospel of Jesus Christ is so nicely adapted to the religious nature and necessities of man—if the shadowing forth of God's moral character and purposes by means of a human life and history, presents him so vividly to the moral emotions of man—ought we not to have anticipated the speedy, general, and permanent triumph of the system? Whereas its success, after so many hundred years, is extremely partial, and but a comparatively small proportion

of our race have been hitherto gained over to even a nominal recognition of its claims as a revelation of God.

The objection, we may reply in the first place, if valid against Christianity, is valid also against every existing ground of religious faith, but is particularly strong against that which is said to be found in the objects and laws of the physical universe. Nature, which is commended to us as a sufficient manifestation of God for all the spiritual wants of man, and whose teachings are eloquent beyond the utmost conceivable power of words, has not vindicated by her success the claims put in by her admirers on her behalf. To no great extent, even now when she is so much more widely studied, and so much better understood than formerly, does she stimulate into development the religious capabilities of the human family—nor does it invariably follow that they who are most conversant with her text, and can read and translate it most fluently, are, in the same proportion, responsive to her spirit. Nay, more! The objection applies in other directions besides that of religion. It is certain that ample provision has been made in the external world for the quickening, nourishment, exercise, and gratification, of our intellectual powers and our sense of beauty, without any corresponding results on the majority of mankind. But we do not, in such case, deem it incumbent on us to question either the fitness or the fulness of that provision, nor to deny its having been made by the beneficence of the Creator. Because men do not, in point of fact, avail themselves of it as they might, and as it is hoped they one day will, we do not deem ourselves justified in drawing the inference that therefore it lacks the stamp of Divine authorization. With the full assent of our reason, we refer the ungainly fact to some other cause, and resolve it into some more general law of Providential government. In like manner, we submit, the incomplete success as yet of Christianity is not in itself a reasonable negation of its pretensions. The objection aimed at *it* really strikes a general principle of Divine administration, and whatever force there is in it, falls not so much on the gospel of Christ as a wisely-adapted manifestation of Deity, as on the arrangements of the great Ruler of the universe, which permit, in many other

instances besides this, the practical failure, temporary only though it may be, of the likeliest of means for the education and elevation of humanity.

There is no ground in reason for expecting that the general principles on which the administration of the Supreme in relation to mankind is conducted, will essentially differ, whether that administration have respect to their spiritual, or merely intellectual, physical, or temporal interests. And it is certain that with regard to the latter, abundant means of good are placed within men's reach, the use, neglect, or abuse of which is suspended on their own choice. Neither is the body nor the mind placed under a necessity so stringent as to force upon them the full enjoyment of which each is capable. Much, after all, is left to the determination of the will, and it is matter of lamentation, that in the vast majority of instances, even in these respects, the will seldom avails itself of the glorious opportunities which come within its range. Rich to profusion as is the provision made by the Ruler of the universe for the instruction and education of the intellect, and for the healthful gratification of the senses, it would seem to a superficial view to be for the most part thrown away, and to result in dead failure. Men in general do not pay much heed to their intellectual life—nor do they conform to those arrangements which would secure to them the highest amount of health and animal enjoyment. Whether we are able to account for that principle of the Divine economy which leaves man's destiny so much in the power of his own wayward will, may, perhaps, be doubtful—but it being in obvious accordance with, or more properly speaking, a part of, the comprehensive plan of Infinite Wisdom, we ordinarily accept it as such, without feeling ourselves under any obligation to vindicate it. In truth, we should as soon think of justifying the volcano, the storm, the flood, the pestilence, as being consistent with the character of the Almighty, as of arguing that certain principles which pervade his moral government of man are compatible with his perfections. The fact once ascertained that such and such is a law of his procedure, we acquiesce in its propriety even where we cannot discern more than the faintest glimmer of its meaning. Now, in things pertaining to our



physical and mental life, we find that whilst on the one hand there are capabilities almost indefinitely expansive, and, on the other, boundless provision made for them, there is, nevertheless, a melancholy amount of waste in both, owing to some perversity of our disposition—and we anticipate the correction of this evil by means only of a long and very gradual process of disciplinary experience. The permission of the evil itself, great as it is, and patent to all, we resolve into some general law of the Divine economy, and feel that it is, on the whole, the wisest and best for us.

But if such a principle regulates all Providential dealings with us, having for their object the education of our being, and if, in uniform coincidence with the operation of that principle, the human family have not, as such, commonly availed themselves of the advantages conferred on them by the benign Creator, and are only slowly advancing to a recognition of their own interests, and of the facilities within reach for promoting them, reason cannot justly object against a professed revelation of God's moral character to the heart of man, that it proceeds on the same principle, and is followed by the like results. Philosophy, we think, should teach us to expect the same regard to man's freedom of choice in religion as elsewhere, and to observe, without surprise or offence, the sequence of a similar class of evils to be mourned. At any rate, Christianity is in perfect keeping with the general drift of God's moral rule, both in regard to its leaving so much within the power of the human will, and in respect of the treatment it has met with in consequence. It is suasive, but not irresistible—it makes ample provision for spiritual life, but does not force men to profit by it.\* It is exquisitely adapted to its purpose—but that

\* "Let us next take a cursory glance at the mode in which God's plan of administration affects the education of this life—the sharpening of its senses—the refinement of its tastes—the gradual ripening of its capacity to discriminate—the training up of its judgment from the feebleness and helplessness of infancy, to the robust and unwavering decision of full manhood. What is it we see? To the eye of a novice, all is chaos—truth and error intermingled—good and evil—wholesome nutriment for the soul, and virulent poison. And it is worthy of remark that oftentimes underneath the



purpose is one which the ignorance or perversity of men may nevertheless frustrate, so far at least, as each is individually concerned. And seeing what we do, in every other department of human being and action, of self-neglect and consequent privation and misery, in the very midst of the wisest possible arrangements for inducing self-culture, and thus raising the

broad, outspreading, and attractive leaves of what is noxious to the religious life, grow hidden, and, till diligently searched for, unseen, modest verities of rare virtue in sustaining or reviving it—and that in the immediate neighbourhood of what is most precious we may commonly look with certainty for what is most vile. Nothing in this apparent jumble of contrarieties is labelled. It is only to experience that external form, colour, or texture, are indicative of the internal qualities which they enclose. That which works mischief is not seldom superficially tempting—that which imparts strength, repulsive. And with what at first sight presents itself as an indescribable confusion, there is no subsequent arbitrary meddling. The root which, just turned up from the earth, is about to parch up the entrails of him seeking sustenance from it, is not plucked from his fatal grasp by a hand from heaven. The path into which the traveller turns in his pursuit of happiness, and which leads to death, is not barred across by insuperable obstacles, nor are its dangers advertised by large-lettered cautions along the road. Many a sentiment has been nursed in the bosom of the Church with more than a mother's fondness, which when full grown has turned out an implacable foe to her peace. Into this world of differing and even conflicting elements, where what is true and divine is mingled with so many false principles, erroneous standards of judgment, deleterious sentiments, vicious and corrupt imaginations, the soul is bidden to go forth in search of spiritual aliment. But although God has not written upon the surface of things, a description of the nature and uses of each, but has devolved upon the spiritual life itself the duty of discrimination, he has not left it without sufficient guidance. It starts in its career with unerring instincts and sensitive sympathies, which when allowed uninterrupted play, can distinguish in broad and simple cases between the precious and the vile. These are rendered more acute by cultivation—and when promptly obeyed, and conscientiously trained, impart a power of moral insight which it is difficult to deceive even by the most specious appearances. Experience gradually follows to correct the mistakes inseparable from first impressions—and each spiritual sense does its part in modifying and rendering more exact the conclusions drawn from the testimony of the others. Like, as in the natural world, all things appear to the eye of infancy in immediate contact with the visual organ, and neither distance nor form are indicated by the disposition of light and shade, until after touch has combined its perceptions

quality of our enjoyments, have we any just ground for concluding that in the department of religion alone, this melancholy phenomenon will be altogether absent? On the contrary, may we not fairly anticipate that the same waywardness of man which is so strikingly exemplified in regard to his inferior but more immediate concerns, should show itself still more

with those of sight, so here, a full and accurate acquaintance with the true must be the united result of many spiritual exercises—a spontaneous generalization of the repeated depositions of all. To multiply illustrations, however, although easy to the writer, might be wearisome to the reader, and, perhaps, superfluous. The point upon which it is desired to fix attention is, that expertness to ‘distinguish things that differ’ is made conditional, by the arrangements of Supreme Wisdom, chiefly upon the proper use of those powers with which spiritual life is endowed. The rules of guidance are to be sought, not in the first utterances of the objects without us, but in the monitions of the life within us. Not so much to impart instruction, which supposes the transmission of knowledge from the object to the subject, as to nourish intuition, which implies the extraction of knowledge by the subject from the object, are outward things arranged in relation to the religious life. The character of the climate is not ordered with a view to the constitution, but the constitution braced with a view to the climate. How we are environed seems to be a secondary matter in the Divine judgment, the most elaborate care being bestowed upon what we possess within us. Our Lord prayed for his disciples ‘not that they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept from the evil thereof.’ There is a close analogy in this respect between God’s proceedings and our own. Observation and experience may have convinced us, how much nobler, and in the main, how much more successful is the effort, to fit the child for his sphere, than to construct a sphere for the child—to train him so that he may go anywhere, rather than to find or make a somewhere into which he may safely go. In short, if we are wise in our educational plans, we shall evince our anxiety very little in shaping exterior circumstances, and very mainly in inducing and strengthening inward qualities and character. A well-cultivated heart is a better safeguard against evil than the best regulated cloister, and as solitude may be more oppressively realized in crowded cities than in unpeopled wildernesses, so the divine life may be fuller of all that makes it what it is in the presence of many forms of evil than in their studied concealment. ‘To the pure all things are pure.’

“‘He that can apprehend,’ says John Milton, in his speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing—‘He that can apprehend and consider vice, with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish,

conspicuously in regard to those which are higher, indeed, but more remote? We have to bear in mind that, in the established order of things, the religious nature is the last to be developed—that religious ideas, however vividly presented, never make their appeal to the heart until it has been strongly pre-occupied—that they can only gain their proper ascendancy by means of repeated struggles—and that at every step of that discipline through which the man must pass with a view to the fulfilment of the highest purpose of his existence, he is called upon to wrestle with tendencies, passions, and motives, which have already acquired great influence over him, and which can only be conquered by a very resolute will. Such being the case, we may reasonably expect that the most suitable revelation of God will operate to the elevation of the race but slowly, and that its progressive action will be characterised by striking vicissitudes.

It is to be further considered that such a manifestation of God as Christianity assumes to be, appears to have required that human agency should be largely resorted to in practically carrying out its gracious designs. The appeal made by it is made to our sympathies—and none is more apt to attract and engage the sympathies of man than his own fellow. But then, here as elsewhere, much is dependent on the fidelity of those who hold the benefit in trust for the rest of mankind. Their

and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot,' he continues, 'praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised, and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue, therefore, which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, is but a blank virtue, not a pure: her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser (whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas), describing due temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see, and know, and yet abstain.'"—*British Churches*, 8vo, pp. 26—31.



unfaithfulness to their appointed mission cannot be rendered impossible without a wide departure from the principles on which moral government proceeds. We may wonder at this suspension of one man's interests on the discharge by another of his responsibilities ; but at any rate, we must admit that herein Christianity is in full accordance with the general plan of the Supreme Ruler. In all other things, health, liberty, mental and moral culture, social progress and happiness, the same law obtains. Myriads are oftentimes affected for good or for evil by the obedience or disobedience of one man to his convictions—and if the gospel of Christ had been framed on other principles, it might well have been objected to as out of keeping with the known laws of moral government. It does, at first sight, appear unaccountable, that the truth which is designed to raise up man to happy communion with the Creator, and to stimulate into exercise and growth the most exalted capabilities of his nature, should be committed, seemingly unprotected, to human keeping. But, doubtless, there are now working out, under the influence of laws at present anomalous to our view, problems of the highest import, and of almost infinite intricacy, the solution of which will affect the destiny of our race, both here and hereafter. If Christianity be indeed divine, then for aught we can tell, its surest, largest, most permanent, most complete triumph over the family of man, may be best insured by suffering every mistake which can be made respecting it, and every absurdity to which it can be perverted, to take palpable form without other let or hindrance than that which the limits of reason may prevent—and any dominant interference for the suppression of human follies, blunders, and infidelities, in regard to it, might be but the putting back the final settlement of some great questions, upon which settlement the universal spread of truth depends. Every patient observer of this world's affairs must know that as various forms of error, by a natural process, develop themselves and die, so they leave the general mind of society in a state of enlightenment and refinement, which renders a return to old prejudices and misconceptions absolutely impossible. So much ground is thus redeemed for ever from the wastes of



human ignorance and folly—redeemed by the hands of truth; and every one will be aware that triumphs like these are of a two-fold value—they diminish the amount of evil to be contended with, and they provide a firmer purchase for the power which contends with it. The incomplete success, therefore, of Christianity—the early obscuration of its simplicity—the growth out of it of a tyrannous system of priestism—and the sad debilitation of its moral power down to the present day, are by no means irreconcilable with the conclusion that it is a revelation of God. These facts are the result of principles, which, although they pervade the gospel system, are not peculiar to it—and the objection urged in bar of its claims on the ground of these and similar facts, is really nothing less than a protest against the wisdom of that plan upon which God is conducting his moral administration.

The foregoing considerations, we think, will go far to neutralise the force of the objection. But is there not another side to the question thus started? If complaint is made of what Christianity has *not* yet done, should not some account be taken of what it *has* accomplished? The train of remark pursued in the first part of this volume led us over an extensive body of results indicative of the agency of a more powerful spiritual influence than is elsewhere to be met with in the history of mankind? If the gospel has not done everything which modern scepticism demands of a divine revelation, it has yet done much more than that scepticism can rationally explain. So long as men dealt honestly by it, its triumphs were rapid and large enough to give full countenance to its pretensions. Certainly, no other religious system, much less that which is based on reasoning and nature, can compete with it, for one moment, in power to beget and sustain spiritual life. No other system has so proved its competence to grapple with man's indifference to things pertaining to God, or to elicit for the Highest the devout affections of his intelligent creatures. It has already done for the world a work which the world needed to be done, and which, until Christianity came, appeared to be a hopeless enterprise—it has rendered possible the exaltation of love to God into the governing motive of the entire

man. It is even now the source of most of the genuine disinterested love which displays itself on the stage of human affairs—and it is gradually but surely throwing off the hard technicalities in which its professed exponents had encased it, and giving promise of again making itself felt when better understood as a spiritual power. Let it be credited with its achievements, as well as debited with its failures. The latter, perhaps, may be much more reasonably explained in connexion with the theory that it is divine, than can the former on the supposition that it is not.

§ 18. CONCLUDING STATEMENT OF THE POSITION TO WHICH THE  
ARGUMENT HAS CONDUCTED US.

Here, then, we pause to take a general survey of the position at which we have arrived. It will be found accurately marked off, we think, by the following conclusions:—

1. Indisputable history sets before us an immense array of facts, the evident result of a spiritual force operating upon the minds of men, which force may be distinctly traced to that objective faith which is embodied in the New Testament writings, such, substantially, as we have them now.

2. On examination of the claims of this objective faith, or, in one word, Christianity, we find its great distinctive characteristic to be this—that it professes to exhibit to the religious capabilities and sensibilities of man, through the medium of one man's life and history, the moral character and purposes of God.

3. Such a revelation of God as Christianity professes to be, corresponds very closely with the instinctive cravings and wants of man's religious nature, the very existence of which implies a suitable external provision for their satisfaction.

4. No other suitable provision for these wants has yet been discovered—the display of God through the objects and laws of the physical universe falling short, as it must do, in the nature of things, of the obvious necessity of the case.

5. That, therefore, which Christianity assumes to supply is precisely what the constitution of man warrants him in looking for somewhere, and fits him to receive, appropriate, and

enjoy. The object answers to the subject in like manner as light, colour, and form, answer to the eye.

6. What Christianity professes to be is countenanced by what it has already done, while as to what it has, as yet, failed to accomplish for humanity, it occupies a similar position to that of other agencies for the education and elevation of our race, known to be the gifts and arrangements of God for that purpose.

7. The design and mode of this alleged manifestation of God having been thus shown to be congruous with reason, we are bound to proceed, without prejudice to its pretensions, to examine the positive evidence it may have to proffer in support of them.

The effect, then, of the whole foregoing argument is this—Facts lead us back to a cause whence they sprang—that cause presents itself to our notice as a professedly peculiar manifestation of the Deity to men. We look at it, and discover that it marvellously corresponds with what our nature and position required, in order to the development of our being, considered in its religious aspect. So far, then, there is nothing contradictory of the claims put forward by Christianity, the cause of these facts, to be accepted as a revelation of God. If anything, the guise in which it comes is confirmatory of its pretensions, and may fairly dispose reason to anticipate that they may be well-founded. “This is not an unlikely thing,” its course of reflection may run, “to have come from God. Nay, more, looked at in the light of man’s own nature, and of the acknowledged and established laws of the Divine government of him, it appears a very likely thing.” But if God has really sent Christianity into the world to reveal his love to it, he will have sealed it with some distinctive mark wherefrom it may be gathered that the revelation is a revelation of HIMSELF—that the one man’s life which purports to show us Deity through humanity is an authorized portrait, adapted only to our powers of vision, of the unseen God—and that he who hath seen Jesus Christ hath seen the Father. Is there any such seal? What is it? Can it be identified as the seal of God? A reply to these inquiries will now be attempted.





## PART III.

### THE SEAL.

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## THE SEAL.

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### § 1. CONNEXION BETWEEN THIS AND THE FOREGOING PART ESTABLISHED.

GOD, translated to the moral perceptions and sensibilities of our nature by means of a human life, is, *ipso dicente*, the burden of Christianity. Spiritual life, or, in other words, living fellowship between the soul of man and its Creator, is the high object at which it aims. For this our inmost being, intelligently, or unconsciously, evermore pants—and the aspirations which God has breathed into every bosom, He, we may be sure, has made an adequate provision to meet and satisfy. That we are so endowed by his creating hand as to be capable of perceiving him, adoring him, loving him, trusting him, is sufficient proof that he has somewhere so displayed himself as may best serve to awaken our perception, and to evoke our adoration, love, and faith. But those works of his which we see outspread before us in the physical universe, and wherein we behold reflected his immensity and infinitude, his wisdom, power, and goodness, necessary as they are, and ever will be, to illustrate for us certain aspects of his being and glory, without some glimpse of which we cannot know him, save in name, do not satisfy *all* the deep yearnings of our Nature, nor so present the Invisible to our hearts as to give them perfect repose, and to convince us that here is the external object in which the internal capability was designed to find its full satisfaction. Our moral constitution craves a *moral* manifestation of Deity—to know him in his relation to conscience—to see him in those aspects of his character which

will shadow forth to our souls his purity as well as his power—his mercy as well as his goodness—his patience, forbearance, tenderness—and, in general, those bearings of his character and will in regard to us and our destiny the proper response to which consists in filial confidence and love. And this want of ours is his handwriting on our nature, to the effect that such a revelation of himself may be looked for, and will be vouchsafed. Christianity comes to us professing to be God's provision for that want—revealing to us that of him which we need and desire to know, in a form that may bring him within reach of our sympathies—love making its appeal to love, but still in inseparable association with truth and righteousness, through the medium of a human person and history. We have seen that this peculiar mode of Divine manifestation fits our need—supplies the complement to what has been called the Gospel of Nature—and closely dovetails, if we may be allowed the phrase, with man's religious sensibilities. Reason, therefore, has nothing to object to it *as a mode* of showing to men the mind and will of the Supreme. By a human life, such a revelation may well, and, so far as we can discern, may best, be made.

This point being settled, our proper business is to look for some distinctive mark which will authorize us in segregating some one individual from the common family of man, and identifying him as the medium through which the needed display of God to our emotional nature has been made. Granted the propriety, not to say necessity, of the thing to be done, we are bound also to admit the propriety of such means as can be proved requisite thereto. Now there is, unquestionably, a sense in which every man is a manifestation of his Maker—and there is a still higher sense in which humanity, in the comprehensive acceptation of the term, is a mirror wherein we may see reflected, although but dimly, the lineaments of the Unseen. But if there be any truth in our former train of observations, the human heart desires, and, in order to an all-commanding spiritual affection, must have, a closer, more compact, more personal, portraiture of God in his moral relations to man—one life which it may gaze upon with implicit confi-



dence as *the* embodiment of its rightful Sovereign—one history which, taken throughout, in all its scenes, incidents, deeds, and sufferings, may be to it, as is the miniature of a father to his child, that to which it will reverentially and fondly turn whenever it would “see God’s face in righteousness.” And in proportion as this unity and individuality of representation is necessary to the free play of our religious emotions, just in the same proportion is it also necessary that the representation itself should exhibit some features the presence of which shall leave no room for mistake as to *who it is* that is thus portrayed. The human life through which God is revealed must needs present to us some indisputable radiations of Deity—some characteristics which shall compel us to admit that they can be attributed to none other than to “the King eternal, immortal, and invisible”—some phase or other of the Divine which, as soon as seen, shall satisfy our reason that it is *God* who is thus set forth. In other words, the nature of the case absolutely requires that the facts of that life should present some special peculiarity which shall infallibly mark it for what it purports to be. We must have this, or we may as well have nothing. If God is ever to draw nigh to us in the mode already indicated as in exquisite harmony with our wants, and with his principles of moral administration, he must so draw nigh as to give us full assurance that it is He. Either we can have no manifestation of him through humanity, or upon that manifestation there must be sufficient and decisive evidence that it is really God who is in our midst. The broad arrow of government must be distinctly visible upon all our materials of religious knowledge and emotion. And hence the necessity of MIRACLES.

§ 2. A SUPERNATURAL SEAL TO REVELATION REQUIRED BY THE NATURE OF THE CASE.

To the supernaturalism of Christianity, we are well aware, modern philosophy is strongly opposed. It seems to be regarded as the main stumbling-block in the way of rational belief. The severest processes of criticism have been freely resorted to, with a view of separating it entirely from the

spiritual truths with which the New Testament blends it, and plausible reasonings have been employed to convince us, that when everything miraculous in the gospel records has evaporated, not one particle of nutriment which Christianity supplies to our religious nature will have been destroyed. We have been reminded again and again that reason needs no such attestation of truths which have upon them already the clear impress of divinity—and that if any further proof were needed, in addition to that furnished by their congruity with our own nature, miracles would not supply it. Whatever the belief in them may have effected in unscientific times, such belief, we are informed, is quite unnecessary now. We have a firmer and a more rational basis upon which to rest our views of God and of his will. We need not “ascend up to heaven,” nor “descend into the abyss,” for, “the word is nigh us, even in our hearts.” Where the ordinary will serve, the extraordinary is superfluous. It but encumbers and impedes the faith which it is engaged to promote. Why not surrender it as a tradition which, whilst it may have answered a useful purpose, time and “the progress of the intellect” have rendered obsolete? There are deep spiritual verities in Christianity which, when severed from their present mythic dress, will command the homage of the highest reason, and they will be accepted for their own sake rather than in deference to an Almighty power with which they have been hitherto associated. For the evidence supposed to be supplied by miracles is not homogeneous with the things to be believed. The question of man’s immortality, for instance, is not so much as touched by any conceivable manifestation of omnipotence; and though all the laws of Nature should be reversed to-morrow, no spiritual dogma would be rendered more visibly true thereby. It is as though the Supreme were unable to convince us without doing violence to his own ordinations—as though he designed to dumbfounder the reason instead of enlightening it, and force an assent to his propositions, not by means of their own intrinsic credibility, but by an exhibition of his boundless might. Such a proceeding is held to be utterly unworthy of Infinite

Wisdom, and, therefore, the supernaturalism of Christianity is philosophically discarded.

All this reasoning, and a great deal more which is closely akin to it, lacks only one thing to make it convincing—applicability to the case in hand. Christianity is not chargeable with the mistake of proffering works of superhuman power as proofs of doctrinal propositions. If some of the exponents of Christianity have made the mistake, the error is theirs, and they should be visited with the penalty of exposure. The true purpose of miracles, as set forth in the New Testament, is to attest *a mission*, not to support *a dogma*. More or less, the object of those who are said to have wrought them, so far as we can collect it from their own language and bearing, was to say to the parties whom they addressed, by works instead of words, "God is with us." But in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, the purpose of miracles was still more precise, specific, and to the point. Supernaturalism was a necessary feature of his work—was "part and parcel" of what he came to do—gave a meaning to his career which else would have been unintelligible—and constituted for all future ages a requisite part of that manifestation of the Deity, upon which faith was to rest, round which the affections were to revolve, and out of which was to spring a "joy unutterable and full of glory." This statement we shall now proceed to establish.

The person and life of Jesus Christ, as we have already largely considered, are spoken of, throughout the New Testament, as exhibiting to men the otherwise unseen God—in such sense, that our Lord himself declared, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." Here is the avowed purport of the Christian faith, and here, if we would judge it fairly, we must take our stand to survey, and to catch the significance of its main characteristics. The means which Christ resorted to must be judged of in their bearing on his end. That end we take to have been a worthy one, a necessary one, called for by the very constitution of our nature, rendered probable by analogy, and justified by the known principles of God's moral government. Christ's life, then—what he was, what he did, what he suffered, what happened to him, and what he taught



—has, according to his own uniform profession, and according to the whole tenour of the sacred writings, a significance which no other life possessed. Truly and thoroughly human in its texture, it was exclusively divine in its purport. It was a sort of condensation, into a form cognisable by our religious sentiment, of that relating to the Highest which is too essentially spiritual to be otherwise perceived, realised, and enjoyed, by creatures such as we. The idea cannot be more forcibly expressed than by the declaration of the Apostle Paul, “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily*.” What the body of man is to his spirit—its instrument of communication with the outer world, that the life of Christ is assumed to be in reference to God—his medium of moral communication to mankind. He, the Everlasting, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, the self-existent and eternal Spirit, he expresses his mind, and character, and will, by means of this one life, and puts himself, so far as this was possible, into the garb of humanity—or, changing the figure, gives us a human version of his own Being—his thoughts, purposes, and propensions—in its relation to man.

§ 3. MIRACLES MUST CONSTITUTE A PART OF ANY COMPLETE  
MANIFESTATION OF GOD.

Now, we submit, with some confidence, that, on the hypothesis that it became God thus to convert the Divine abstract into the human concrete with a view to meet our emotional wants, he would do it as completely as the nature of the case would possibly admit of. Through that selected medium would be poured as much light upon men’s hearts as it could transmit. The object would be only limited by the capability of the subject. Whatever a man’s life could be made to show of God, would be shown. The manifestation would be neither stinted nor partial. We have a right to conclude thus much from what we may observe of his proceedings in the natural world. When he gives, he gives like himself. For all our physical wants he has furnished a various and profuse supply. All our intellectual powers, all our tastes, all our emotions, are provided with the widest scope for exercise, with countless



objects for gratification. In respect of these, he has heaped up riches for us—bestowed them without measure. No niggard hand is his in meeting the desires of his creatures. This earth of ours nowhere exhibits him as unwilling to impart more than absolute necessity requires. Every garden, every field, every stream—mountain, desert, and ocean—the air we breathe, the sun that shines over our heads, the changing seasons, the starry firmament—all bear unceasing testimony to the munificence of his communicativeness. Through all, and in an inconceivable variety of methods, does he impart to us out of his inexhaustible fulness, and give to us as much of himself as our capacities can receive. And this law of his administration we may expect to prevail in every arrangement designed to shadow forth himself. If Christianity is from him—if the life of Christ is his moral expression of how he stands, and what he wills, in relation to men, then may we be fully assured that the expression will be both adequate and vivid. Nothing will be left out necessary to the completeness of the representation. If humanity cannot be made to reflect the eternity, the boundlessness, and the self-existence of the Divine nature, that attribute of his which seems to our apprehensions to be most nearly akin to them, which most readily suggests them, and which *can* be thus embodied or reflected, will surely be displayed. At all events, we have abundant reason to conclude that nothing of God which is capable of being put into a human form of representation, more especially if in its own nature it is calculated to shed light upon the rest, will be omitted. God disclosing himself through whatever medium, may fairly be expected so to disclose himself as that he shall be known *as God*.

*Power* is one of the attributes of the Almighty—ability to do according to the decision of his own will, limited by no external restrictions, subject to no law but that of his own imposing, stayed by no impediment which he is incompetent to remove. Power is the idea which we, in the limited range of our faculties, primarily associate with Deity. The child and the savage identify God with the tempest more readily than with the flower, and stand in awe before his might when they are

insensible to his goodness. It is doubtful whether any conceivable display of himself to men, in their present state, could be appreciated as such, in which the element of power was not largely embodied. It is just possible, indeed, that some minds should have given such exclusive culture to their love of beauty, or have fostered their logical faculty into such disproportionate development, as to be more alive to the divine in things that present God to their æsthetic taste, or their power of reasoning, than in those which illustrate his boundless might. But this cannot be said of mankind in general. To them, any manifestation of the Supreme, predominantly moral though it might be, which should omit his power, be devoid of all radiation of his omnipotence, or fail to show him as one having authority over any of the works of his own hands, would be but nugatory, and obtain no credit. "Show us what you can *do*," is the first impulsive suggestion of our common sense, of our rational instincts, when challenged to believe that a man has come from God. Perhaps, in that high state of civilization to which we look forward, earthly authority may be accepted, revered, and submitted to, without need of any of the pomp and ceremony by which it is now symbolized. The king may descend from his throne, lay aside for ever his crown and sceptre, and mingle freely and unostentatiously with his meanest subjects, without endangering their loyalty, or impairing the sentiment of respect with which they are wont to regard his office. But, at present, and in the estimation of the multitude, a king would be no king without these symbols—and where there were no *regalia*, it would be thought, there can be no right to rule. Much after this sort would be the feeling of men, aye ! and of the most highly cultured among us too, if called to contemplate any portraiture of the Almighty from which his power should have been excluded. Without this feature, the resemblance would be generally held to be so incomplete as to be very questionable. We cannot realize to our own satisfaction any idea of the Supreme Sovereign wherein no show of his power displays itself. Had Jesus Christ, proclaiming himself to be the Son of God, the Image of the Invisible, pursued his career through life without once exhi-

biting, or offering to exhibit, this, the most striking aspect, to human appreciation, of the Divine nature, all men would have concurred in concluding that his professed mission must be rejected, forasmuch as its scope had not been adequately filled. One part of what pertains to God, and that the part which is least imitable, and can be least successfully pretended to, by man, it would have been urged, and justly, has been left out of the representation altogether—namely, his competency to give effect at pleasure to his own will, all external impediments notwithstanding—and how, therefore, it might have been asked, shall we be assured that the other parts truly adumbrate him? The omission, now so strenuously contended for, would undoubtedly have proved fatal to the whole scheme.

This will become still further apparent when it is considered that the life of Christ purports to set forth not merely the perfections of the Eternal in a state of repose, if we may thus express it, but in active exercise with a view to a man's well-being. It is not Divine wisdom only, or goodness, or rectitude, or love, which that life was meant to exemplify—for the life of every good man does this in a measure—but it was all these in full action for the accomplishment of a result in which humanity was declared to be especially interested. They were all set forth in connexion with a *plan* to which men were invited to give in their hearty adhesion. They were all illustrated with a view, not to attract a barren attention, but to secure for God a great practical result. Their combined light, turned directly upon man's conscience and heart, was meant to induce a willing surrender of both to the moral claims of his spiritual Sovereign. Benign as was their aspect, they had also a command to enforce. It was not enough that they should shine—they were also to vivify. They had their mission from one will to another—a will which is above law, to a will under law—and they were to bring the two into harmony by subduing the lesser to the greater, the derived and dependent to the uncreated and self-existent. They were, in this case, agents for authority—and the end of their appearance would be achieved only by taking back to God man's glad submission to his government. Here, then, we see a sufficient reason why



they should be associated with Almighty power. A display of that perfection of the Supreme, in alliance with those others of which we have just spoken, would give peculiar meaning and force to their demand upon man's obedience. The wisdom, the goodness, the rectitude, the love, which presented themselves in human guise before man's heart, and asked an unreserved surrender of it to spiritual law, would make their appeal all the more surely for being accompanied by superhuman power. They would be the more readily regarded as divine manifestations *having the intent signified*, if connected with somewhat pertaining to him which could neither be imitated nor forged. The practical aim of Christ's work—that change of affection, of will, of life, which he assumed to seek in men by an impersonation to them of the Unseen—rendered it specially necessary that he should not withhold from them some exemplification of what, more than anything else, would convince them that between him and the Omnipotent there was the relation that he claimed—some tokens of a visible subjection to his will, so far as he might choose to put it forth, of all external hindrances. Resembling God in this, and thus making good his high pretension just where, if it were not well founded, he would infallibly have failed, the truthfulness and reality of his representation in all other respects would be readily inferred. And hence, miracles *would* constitute a seal to his mission in perfect harmony with its ulterior purpose, and having an authoritative force upon a well-ordered reason.

§ 4. NO MORAL DISPLAY OF GOD BY MEANS OF A HUMAN LIFE COULD BE OTHERWISE AUTHENTICATED.

We advance a step further. We contend that apart from some display of omniscience and Almighty power, such as is given in prophecy and in miraculous acts, there could have been no revelation through a human life of *any* of the perfections of God, in such a manner as would enable us to identify them as incontestably His. These are the only attributes of Deity, presentable, at least, through the medium of a man's history, which may be distinguished clearly and infallibly from all the semblances of them which ordinary humanity may pro-



duce. The wisdom of a wise man, for instance, and the wisdom of a man in whom might dwell "the fulness of the Godhead bodily," differ, to our capabilities of perception, in degree only, nor are there any well-defined limitations and cognisable lines of distinction, having regard to which we may pronounce satisfactorily to our reason—"the wisdom on this side is human, on the other side is divine." We cannot say with certainty how far the mind of man, under the operation of merely natural laws, is capable of exhibiting this glorious endowment—what are the limits within which human imperfection will necessarily confine it—or to what extent a combination of happy opportunities, a fine organization, and assiduous culture, might possibly develop it. Besides, wisdom is only appreciable by wisdom. The more perfect it is, the less likely it is to obtain the approbation of folly. It is one of those qualities which can only be discerned by a spirit in which there is something akin to itself. The majestic proportions of such an intellect as Lord Bacon's cannot be comprehended by an unintellectual man—and the moral fitness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, supposing it to be all that it professes to be, requires, in order to a perception of the wisdom which planned it, some previous cultivation of the mind and heart. Nor should we forget that being illustrated to us by a man's history it necessarily takes a form predominantly human, and hence is less likely to suggest its own high origin. Were Thomas Carlyle to speak to a child in a strain of reflection befitting his philosophical eminence he would not be understood—and were he, in order to become intelligible, to translate his thoughts into childish language, images, and associations of ideas, his vast intellectual superiority would be, to a great extent, hidden from the child addressed by the very effort of adaptation which the necessity of the case had required. Now, it should be borne in mind, that any revelation of God, as "the only wise God," must be made to a world not very competent at best to appreciate the display—and when we take into account the mental and moral condition of the great mass of mankind, we shall surely feel ourselves bound to concede, that it is not by any gleams of divine wisdom streaming in

upon them through a human medium, that God is likely to be generally recognised and welcomed by the children of this earth.

A similar line of observation will apply to all the moral attributes of God—truth, rectitude, goodness, and the like. Taken alone, or even in association one with another, it needs a very nice discriminating power to determine, in any given illustration made through humanity, whether what is exhibited of them comes directly from Himself, or is only indirectly reflected in the manner in which every good man shows forth the glory of the Deity. The life of Christ might have been a perfectly faultless embodiment of them all, without having in it, for the rest of men, any other force than that of example. We could not have collected from them, however lustrously exhibited, that they were manifestations to us of the Unseen God—nor would they by themselves have sufficed to prove a direct appeal of the Divine will made to ours. The declaration by our Lord himself of his purpose and mission would, indeed, have been rendered the more credible by these qualities of his character—but in an affair of such unspeakable importance, we should reasonably have craved more decisive confirmation. For, it is conceivable that a man may be under some mental illusion as to the main purport of his life, and yet exhibit in marvelous perfection these attributes of moral character—nay, the extraordinary strength with which they are developed in him may itself suggest to his active imagination a reason and an end for their existence which have no foundation in reality. But there are other moral qualities in the life of Christ which derive their whole significance from his assumed mission—which not only do not bear upon themselves the exclusive imprint of divinity, but which without some accompanying attestation lose very much of their own meaning. Condescension, humility, meekness, patience, voluntary subjection to suffering, and anxious solicitude for the welfare of others, will operate with a powerful force upon our moral sympathies, if we are assured that they are an authorized version, in a human type, of the mode in which God regards and will deal with us. But unless they have upon them

this specific meaning—unless there is clearly written upon them the Divine name, they instantly sink into the merest common-place. Condescension ceases to be such—humility loses its principal charm—meekness and gentleness are robbed of their exquisite pathos—suffering can no longer be regarded as voluntary—and concern for the well-being of others becomes transmuted from a rich consolation to bleeding hearts, and a soothing assurance to terrified consciences, into an amiable trait of character which, however we may admire, can constitute no basis for our trust. Behind all these must be the radical idea of God, in order to give them due moral power over our sympathies. Unless it can be fully ascertained that He is the soul of which these are the countenance—that it is none other than He, who, when humanly represented, is thus disposed towards men—there is practically no revelation at all. Everything may be divine in reality—but it is not so to our apprehensions. Nor, indeed, can it become so without something additional and much more distinctive. We could only regard the life of Christ as a very fitting one for the manifestation of God in the flesh—but we could not confidently receive it as marked off from human life in general to answer this high purpose to our souls. Neither his wisdom, nor those moral attributes of his to which we have adverted, carry with them to our convictions any sufficient and decisive confirmation of his own claim to be received as the *only*-begotten Son of God.

Knowledge, it is true, does admit of being so displayed, as to proclaim its origination in a higher than a human source. In respect of this feature of intelligent being there exists a definite line of demarcation separating between the merely human and the necessarily divine. The future is not known to us. Sagacious conjectures may be pretty readily distinguished from decided predictions. If it can be made clear to us that remote events yet to come are within the cognisance of a human mind, and that in all their circumstantial details and surrounding contingencies they have been described as facts which would certainly occur—more especially if the time of their occurrence has been accurately set forth—we have a



reasonable assurance that man is here only an instrument in conveying to us intimations beyond his natural ken. Now to God the future is as the past, and both future and past are as the present—and certainly, if it pleased him to approach us in the guise of humanity, in order to make himself the better known to our religious nature, some few scintillations of this his foreknowledge would be to us a token whereby to distinguish and identify him. It is true that no immediate purpose would be subserved thereby, because between the prediction and the event there must needs be interposed a sufficient breadth of time to take it beyond the possible range of mere conjecture. Or even if the manifestation of himself in such mode, and the leading features of that life wherein he displayed himself, were themselves the fulfilment of prophecy, the proof, although convincing, when fairly made out, is more complicated and less readily got at, than, taking the general condition of mankind into account, the exigency of the case requires. Now, it is not unworthy of notice that the life of Christ purports to be a realization of several ancient prophecies—nor that he himself is represented, in the memoirs of him which have been handed down to us, as distinctly foretelling future events. It is no part of our present business to verify these pretensions. Let them, by all means, be tested by appropriate investigation, and allowed or rejected according to the evidence by which they are sustained. All that it concerns us to remark at the present moment is, that these pretensions are not superfluous—that in any such display of God as that which the life of Christ assumes to be they may be expected to have place—that they are in perfect keeping with its avowed object—that if not absolutely necessary to it, they are so consistent with it that their absence might have been urged as a presumption against its truth, and might have afforded ground for the remark that there was at least one inlet of demonstration to our minds of which God, in revealing himself through our nature, had failed to take advantage. Still, as we just now intimated, foreknowledge, when offered as a distinctive characteristic of Deity, and employed to stamp a human life with an exclusively divine purpose, is too slow in



its effects to answer all the ends desired. It is more valuable for subsequent corroboration of belief than for immediately producing it. It attests a present Deity, but it does so by a process which men in general find it tedious and difficult to follow throughout. It is a sort of hieroglyphic which, although it stands for a definite and ascertainable meaning, can only be deciphered by the light of considerable previous information. It is of service—but, alone, it is insufficient for the practical uses of a busy and spiritually indifferent world. It might satisfy the inquisitive—it might let in light upon the already cultivated mind—but it is but ill-suited to rouse the indolent, to seize the attention of the pre-occupied, and to force upon the notice of the stolid and the ignorant, who constitute, alas ! by far the greater proportion of mankind, appreciable evidence that God has tabernacled in their midst. Human want asks something more tangible, more direct, more forcible, in order to an easy identification with the Ruler of the Universe of that *one* life through which, as we have seen, God can best draw nigh to our sympathy and affection.

This want nothing but a miraculous display of power can adequately meet. An individual working in visible subjection to the physical laws of Nature may indeed effect astounding results, but none which surely connect him with an express moral purpose of his Creator. But a man working at will, quite irrespectively of all natural antecedents and sequents, setting them aside and overruling them at pleasure, exhibits just that phase of the Supreme which cannot be mistaken for a mere exaltation of human powers. The difference between the one action and the other is a difference not of degree, but of kind. We instinctively attribute the settled order of Nature to the will of the Sovereign Creator—we believe that that order cannot be disturbed, in any given instance, save in conformity with the will by which it was established—and from any series of well-proven facts, if such facts there may be, exhibiting results brought about in entire independence of fixed physical laws, we irresistibly draw the conclusion that the power to which they owe their existence is divine. And it is essential to observe, that power exerted at the instance

of man can only be demonstrated to be "the power of God" when it *is* thus independent of the established order of things. If put forth in conformity with ascertainable and ordinary cause and effect, it proves nothing beyond a knowledge of the laws of Nature and skill in applying them. It would not take us out of the assigned or assignable limits of the human, and land us within those of the divine. If, therefore, God was to show himself *as God* by means of a man's life and history—if the manifestation of him, to be complete and to the purpose, must necessarily exemplify his power—and if that power, to be rendered capable of identification with his direct will, must be exerted otherwise than in conformity with pre-existing physical laws—then, it is obvious that, granting the life of Christ to have for its object the representation of Deity through humanity for moral ends which could not otherwise be attained, the working of miracles will be a necessary feature of that life—a feature which being present seals the whole as divine—a feature which being absent subjects the whole to reasonable doubt, and deprives it almost entirely of its practical moral value. The theory of a revelation by means of a human life is either philosophically untenable, or miracles, if fairly attested, are entitled to belief. The former necessitates the latter. They stand or fall together. Christ's life is *not* what it purports to be—God manifest in the flesh—unless the power of working miracles be comprised within it. It could not have been marked off from human life generally, as a chosen medium for showing forth the moral aspects of God's character, and their bearings on our destiny, by any other practical and cognisable method. It would have been devoid of any special religious significance. It would have brought home no direct appeal on God's behalf to our spiritual emotions. No influence would have emanated from it to win man's heart for his Maker, or open up to him the happiness of willing subjection to moral government. Christ's history would have been a mere individualization of barren generalities—an exemplification of qualities, not an adumbration of God. But this is not what our religious nature yearns to possess—this is not what, possessing, will yield it full satisfaction. To every eye there

must be encircling, as it were, the head of the God-revealing man a glory indicative of the indwelling Deity—a bright but subdued radiation of the Almighty—an intelligible symbol of Supreme rule—a diadem of power matching with the throne of “the King of kings and Lord of lords.” And this could only be by means of prophecy and miracle—chiefly and predominantly of miracle. If by any other means, what were they? Not by wisdom, for we cannot properly appreciate it—not by truth, or rectitude, or goodness, for these in man differ nothing in kind from these in God, but only in degree—much less by condescension, humility, gentleness, patience, resignation, and the like, for these have in them so deep a tinge of humanity as to be startling to our emotions when ascertained from other attestations to be but suitable versions, in our own nature, of God’s disposition towards us. By what other means, then, was it possible to designate Christ’s life to our dull apprehension, as the Image of the Invisible? What other divine attributes but those of knowledge and power could so pass through the medium of a man’s history, as to carry with them infallible marks of their divinity?—and in what form could knowledge and power achieve the needed result, but in that of prophecy and miracles?

§ 5. MIRACLES WERE NECESSARY TO THE MAIN PURPOSE OF CHRISTIANITY.

The *purpose* of miracles, then, in the life of Christ, is thoroughly of a piece with its avowed object. His mission was peculiar. It was not to show God to men didactically, by means of discourse, although unquestionably discourse constituted one portion of that entire instrumentality by which he was to make his Father known to the world—but it was to represent God symbolically, his own person and history being the symbols, and in this wise to present him to the affections and sympathies of our religious nature. A pervading element of supernaturalism was therefore necessary to give completeness, authentication, and significance, to the symbol employed. It was *part of the revelation*, not essentially requisite for its own sake indeed, but absolutely needed to



stamp the other part as divine and to impart to it its fulness of meaning. It attested, not the truth of a doctrine, but the reality of a fact. It resembled that lustre of the eye, and that indescribable beaming of the countenance, which, among men, are attestations, because expressions, of true genius—only, in this case, the organ was a man's life, and the mind which shone through it was the mind of God—the supernaturalism being the expression by which we identify the present Deity. If this be the true purpose of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ, those attributed to his apostles and immediate followers readily fall into their proper place. Achieved in *his* name, they still authenticate *his* mission—still serve to mark off his life from human life in general, as the medium by which God has condescended to disclose himself and his love to our hearts—still impart significance to what he was, and did, and suffered, with a view to quicken and develop our religious sensibilities. And if this be, as we contend, the true purpose of miracles, as interpreted by Christianity itself, then, very much, if not most, of the argument aimed against them, as being devoid of the demonstrative power necessary to produce a rational belief in religious dogmas, falls to the ground. They *are* demonstrative of that which they propose to demonstrate. They do prove that Jesus Christ had authority for saying, “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” They are veritable flashings forth through him of the Almighty. They put the seal of God upon his life—and they warrant our reason, if our reason can but be satisfied that they were performed, in concluding with the centurion, “Truly this was the Son of God.” Once more, therefore, we say, Granted our need of a revelation of God to our affections—granted the fitness of a human life as the medium of such a revelation—and you grant also the necessity of miracles. The end comprehends the means—the means tally with the end. All is homogeneous. We must accept all, or we must reject all. No miracles, no Christianity. They not only intertwine—they are woof and warp of the same fabric. The entire system is unphilosophical—that is, out of keeping with our nature, and the principles of God's



government—or the supernaturalism of the Gospels is philosophically tenable. *We* do not say, at present, that a single miracle has been proved. That, indeed, is not our business. But this we say, that no one has a right to object to them as unnecessary, or as having no convincing power, unless he has first proved a manifestation of God to our moral emotions by means of human life and action to be unnecessary to the spiritual life of the world—for the latter implies the former.

The purpose of Christ's life, then, being regarded in the New Testament representation of it, supernaturalism becomes an essential feature of it. That purpose could only have been reached by the aid of miracles. It was one which would admit of no other adequate attestation. That of miracles *is* adequate. Moreover, it had special advantages of its own. It served not only to prove the mission of Christ, but it did so in a manner peculiarly appropriate to the exigencies of the occasion. A word or two on this point may here be usefully subjoined.

§ 6. AS AN AUTHENTICATION, SUPERNATURALISM IS THE MOST READILY UNDERSTOOD AND APPRECIATED.

The work of Jesus Christ being, in our view of it, God's appeal to the moral affections of mankind, with a view to quicken and develop in them the religious life—the highest kind of life of which their nature is capable—it would seem fitting that the proof offered for the purpose of identifying that appeal with Him, should be such as might be readily understood and appreciated by the least intellectual. Any lengthened process of reasoning, if constituted the instrument of belief, would have limited the benefits of the supposed revelation to a very narrow minority. By far the greater portion of men are incapable of estimating evidence the force of which depends upon a nice logical perception—and the very want of exercise which incapacitates them for close reasoning indisposes them also to attempt it. Had it, therefore, been *possible* to authenticate Christ's mission by other and more elaborate proof than that supplied by miracles, there would still remain sufficient reason for resorting to the latter. They speak to men's convictions in intelligible and homely language. Their

testimony requires no translation by the more intellectual to make its force felt by rude and uncultivated minds. Ignorant people, common people, busy people, can understand and appreciate it. And of such the world mainly consists. Would you substantiate to their satisfaction a great moral truth, you must address your evidence to their instinctive sagacity. Perhaps with exquisite discrimination, and by a chain of subtle reasoning every link of which is perfect, you might lead on well-disciplined minds to a conclusion that where such and such moral features present themselves, especially in relation to such and such a moral purpose, the Divine sanction of it may be strongly inferred. But, alas! for the undisciplined, if any belief identified with their highest interests is made dependent upon their being able or willing to follow you. But show them a series of miracles, and intuitively they will recognise in them the hand of God. So it is represented to have been, and very naturally too, in our Lord's time. When the people witnessed any striking display of superhuman power by Jesus Christ, "straightway," we are told, "they glorified God." Their unsophisticated minds worked their way to a conclusion after a fashion which has been ratified by common sense in all ages, and which was well put into words by one of themselves—"Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God he could do nothing." And this is the kind of proof best suited to the world's circumstances. It is short and decisive. The conclusion to be reached lies within view of the premises. The interval between the one and the other is but a step, and may be passed without accompanying misgivings—*will* be passed by most without further hindrance from intervening subtleties than a strong man owns to in the gossamer filaments that cross his garden path. Given, the actuality of the witnessses, and it will require sore effort to shake their testimony. Admit miracles into court, and with most men there will be an

end to the question in support of which their depositions are made.

§ 7. ADAPTED TO OUR LOVE OF THE MARVELOUS.

But there is another point to which we may call attention in connexion with this part of our subject. An appetite for the marvelous is natural to us. It is not acquired by education—it is instinctive. It comes not from reflection—it is a law of our being. Experience may do much to correct it. Increased knowledge may rectify its earlier blunders. It may even be wholly suppressed by a stronger tendency of our constitution, as may other passions—but the germ of it is born with us and very speedily becomes developed. It may, therefore, be set down as owing its existence to the wisdom and will of the Creator. He implanted it in our bosoms—and if it is to him we are indebted for it, we have a right to conclude that it was not given us for nought. It has some proper function—and in discharging that function it will contribute to our well-being. Closely examined, however, we may discover two somewhat remarkable conditions affecting the exercise and gratification of this instinct. The first is, that it does little or nothing to subserve the purposes of the present life; and the second, that it strongly craves the supernatural. An appetite for the marvelous seems to answer no desirable practical end in relation to our *present* state of being, exclusively considered. It prompts us to no useful career. It guides us through no labyrinth. It brings home to us no useful results. But it often misleads, by inclining us to anticipate consequences for which we have not worked, to exaggerate events which it would be more serviceable to us to contemplate as they are, and to rush on to remote conclusions without pausing to examine the steps by which they are reached. Hence it is usually characterised as a vulgar passion, and men of education are loth to plead guilty to it. This mode of regarding it does not strike us as strictly philosophical. The instinct cannot be without its appointed use. Worthless for practical purposes in relation to our every-day affairs, and perpetually given to mistake, is it not just possible that we miss its proper object and sphere?



It appears to have a powerful affinity with the supernatural. It delights in dreams and "visions of the night." Fairy land is one of its favourite haunts. It converses with the ghosts of the departed. Witches and demons are its familiars. It hears voices from heaven. It reads portents in the clouds. It sees signs in the stars. It peoples earth, air, and ocean, with invisible beings. And as the clearer light of intellectual day dissipates these fancies, it sighs over their departure, and looks back with envy on the times of childishness and ignorance when these things were surely believed. Now, underlying all these grotesque forms in which man's passion for the marvelous has displayed itself, is it not reasonable to conclude that there is something worthy of God the giver, deserving nourishment from man, and capable of being applied to right glorious ends? Is it for nothing, or for worse, that we are so strongly borne on by an impulse from within towards a region beyond the senses, and on the other side of the pale of physical laws? Why should we have been so constituted as instinctively to project our thoughts and our belief beyond the limits of the tangible, and be ever tempted to stray across the border which divides the known from the unknown, the natural from the supernatural? May it not be that thus God is intimating to us our connexion with some other system than that which immediately surrounds us—and is preparing us for some higher conclusions than those which we can logically reason out? May not this strong passion of our nature be to us a sign and a proof of our kinship to the spiritual world, and predispose our hearts to listen to the voice which addresses us from thence? If not, what is its object? And if it be, how is the passion externally met? We answer, on the last hypothesis, which we believe to be the true one, by the supernatural in revelation. A belief in miracles modern scepticism is fond of imputing to man's natural love of the marvelous. Modern scepticism is right. Between the undeniable instinct and the object which gratifies it there is a close correspondence. What do we conclude from this? That miracles are to be received as true? No—no more than that, for the same reason, fairies, witches, ghosts, and hobgoblins are to be regarded as realities.



But we do say this, that a belief in miracles, the actual performance of which can be *proved* only by far other kind of evidence, is so natural to man, is so cognate with his constitution, is so apt an exercise of an inborn craving, as to render them very appropriate agents in furtherance of a divine revelation in a world like ours. Supposing them, as we have done, to be essentially necessary to the professed purpose of God in the life of Jesus Christ, it is, assuredly, no light advantage that there is a somewhat in man which disposes him to accept such evidence. Whether that somewhat was implanted in him by the Creator to fit him for receiving the right impression from supernatural works we will not take upon us to determine. But thus much, we apprehend, is clear—that we have our love of the marvelous from God himself—that we are constantly impelled by that love, which subserves no useful purpose in regard to our temporal well-being, towards the supernatural—and that this impulse produces among mankind a general aptitude to receive a miraculous attestation—the only sufficient attestation to the reality of any manifestation of God through man to man with a view to spiritual life and enjoyment.

#### § 8. UNIVERSALLY EXPECTED IN CONNEXION WITH A REVELATION.

Another important consideration bearing on this point here opens upon us. All men *expect* miracles in connexion with a revelation of God. All religions have pretended to them. This fact is constantly urged in disparagement of the alleged miracles of Jesus Christ. “You do but proffer what every false religious system has proffered in its own behalf from the beginning of time.” But how comes it that every false system has thus relied upon the miraculous? Why this uniformity of answer, unless it had been felt that there was in the minds of men a question which demanded it? Whence does it happen that everywhere, and in all ages, humanity has been understood to ask of the man who professes to speak the mind and will of God to his fellow-men for their religious guidance and profit, “What doest thou? What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?” Inasmuch as a profession of supernatural powers

when unsustained by conscious integrity, requires a great deal of cautious management in order to secure it against detection, and, in the event of failure, is likely to be extremely damaging, why has it been so invariably resorted to by men essaying to found a system of religious faith and worship? We answer, because human nature *expects* that such essays shall be made good by miraculous attestations. It would appear to be a demand springing up from the depths of man's being, spontaneously, universally. And here, again, we are warranted by analogy in looking for somewhat external corresponding with the internal impulse. The common expectation of mankind which has led to so many spurious and counterfeit efforts to meet it, justifies the inference that, somewhere or other, the reality to which it points, and for which it is a manifest preparation, will make its appearance. Hypocrisy is homage paid to virtue—falsehood to truth—pretence to reality. There is little philosophy in the haste which consigns to contempt and disbelief a host of make-believes, without looking in the neighbourhood of them for the truth which they are meant to resemble. The shadow which often falls upon the path of the traveller may be mistaken for what it is not—and again and again, after chasing it, he may reap nothing but disappointment—but it is not wholly a cheat put upon his senses—it is projected by some solid body, somewhere between himself and the light of heaven, although he see it not. These vulgar anticipations which have projected, or caused the projection, of so many pretences to miraculous power in connexion with a revelation of God, are “a great fact,” notwithstanding the numberless impostures to which they have given rise, and they remain to be matched with something external, after all those impostures have been detected and exposed. *They* are not to be thrown on the dust-heap of antiquated rubbish along with the trash with which fanaticism or fraud have sought to feed them, at least by men who are accustomed to look beneath the surface of this world's mistakes for the soil out of which they grow. If it be asked, how is the false to be distinguished from the true, or what further reason we have for accepting the miracles of Christianity than those of confessedly erroneous

systems of belief, we answer, No other than that which results from the application to them of reasonable tests, and seeing how they abide the scrutiny. But it does not follow that because many professions, under such investigation, turn out to be unfounded, that there cannot be one capable of being satisfactorily sustained. On the contrary, where there are many competitors, it may reasonably be inferred that there is something real to be competed for, and that the prize will be ultimately carried off by one deserving it. This is a point to be determined by evidence only. But at least, this is certain—that the universal expectation of miracles in authentication of a revelation of God, had put the world in a state of preparedness to recognise them as such, whenever presented, and constitutes, therefore, an additional reason why they should be vouchsafed.

§ 9. FITTED TO AWAKEN ATTENTION, AS WELL AS TO PRODUCE  
BELIEF.

Once more, the main obstacle to the progress of a spiritual revolution in the world, was constituted by its indifference to religious truth. Prior to the appearance of Jesus Christ, mankind, both Jew and Gentile, had sunk into such a condition of apathy, in regard to things pertaining to God and conscience, as to need some shock in order to the recovery of even a moderate degree of feeling. A mere preacher of righteousness might have found it difficult to make his voice heard, amid the universal hubbub of the inferior passions, beyond the limits of his own locality, or the confines of his own generation. There was not sensitiveness enough in the mass to transmit a religious impulse far beyond the spot where it was originally communicated. The slumbering, dreaming patient, required to be roused before the wine of a new life could be administered. The difficulty to be overcome was like that of a man in a turbulent public meeting, who, if he could but obtain a hearing, would speedily hush the clamour to rest. The life of Christ might have been quickly forgotten, had not a space in the world's eye been cleared for it by supernaturalism. Not, indeed, that we are justified in assuming on *this* ground the



necessity of miracles. Doubtless God could, in perfect harmony with the laws of our nature, have otherwise conquered or prevented the difficulty. We cannot reason from our defectiveness of knowledge to a limitation of his resources, whether of wisdom or of power. But, looking at New Testament history as it has reached us, and glancing at it in juxtaposition with that supplied from other sources, we see a very important and requisite end to be gained by a display of miraculous power in the life of Christ, and by the hands of his immediate followers, over and above its efficacy in authenticating his mission. There cannot be a moment's question that belief in his and their miracles, whether it was warranted by facts or was the effect of delusion, helped on Christianity mightily in the early ages of the Church. It was the resurrection of Christ from the dead to which his apostles testified with such untiring zeal, such unquenchable courage, such cheerful self-sacrifice—and it was in this alleged fact, more than in aught else, that men recognised the seal of God to his benign mission. True! the men who attended Jesus throughout his public career, who saw him apprehended, who mingled with the crowd when he was crucified, who professed to have beheld him alive after his passion, and who gave themselves up thenceforth to every species of insult, persecution, and, at last, to death, in bearing witness to the fact, *may* have been deluded. But, assuredly their unwavering faith in that supposed miracle not only nerved them to heroism, but attracted to their religious teaching an amount of the world's attention which it would never otherwise have gained. It was as the great bell of the universe calling all men to worship and meditation. The vibration of its tones is audible even now. A religion without a miracle would stand small chance of being listened to in this noisy arena of human strife and struggle. It argues terribly against human nature that it should be so—but so, unhappily, it is. Philosophy is bound to accept facts such as they *are*, not deduce inferences from what they *ought* to be—and the facts as they are assure us that men in general are not prepared for a religious faith into which no supernatural element has been infused. And



if this be so—and if the life of Christ be what it purports to be—God manifest in the flesh—we see another peculiar advantage secured by the attestation of that all-important fact by miracles. Thus, the demands of the case seem to be met in many ways by one and the same arrangement—another feature of Christianity analogous to God's usual method of proceeding.

10. INCOMPATIBILITY OF MIRACLES WITH GOD'S CHARACTER  
CONSIDERED.

Thus far, then, we presume to think, reason has nothing to object to this kind of evidence in authentication of the divine mission of Christ. It is pertinent—it is necessary—and it is specially adapted to the wants of those to whom it is addressed. There is, however, a still wider question involved, a satisfactory settlement of which is demanded, before these professed witnesses for God can be allowed to give testimony. A point of law must be first argued and decided, affecting the admissibility of the sort of proof they offer. A miracle, it is alleged, would require, in order to its production, a departure from those principles on which the Supreme Ruler is conducting the affairs of the universe, which principles, having been adopted by Infinite Wisdom as the rule of his proceedings, cannot be laid aside without bringing the Divine character under the imputation of inconstancy. An afterthought may be admitted in man's operations, because it may result from increased knowledge—but an afterthought on the part of God, or acts which must appear to his creatures to result from it, would imply an originally defective view of his own dominions, which cannot be attributed to him without impeaching his perfection. When he settled the order of the physical world, he had present to his all-seeing mind every contingency which could happen whereby his judgment could be affected—and the laws he has laid down for its regulation, must be understood to express his view of the whole case before him, and his will regarding it. Any subsequent suspension of, or deviation from, those laws, therefore, implies the occurrence of a demand which was not primarily taken into account, and provided for.

But to admit this, would be to attach imperfection to our notions of the Supreme Being, and, in effect, to undeify him. To any such results no appearances, how unaccountable soever, should be permitted to conduct us. It is one which reason must repudiate as soon as it is caught sight of, and must protest against after this fashion, "Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar." On this high ground, it is argued, miracles must be rejected, whatever the strength of the evidence on which they rest. They are, in their very nature, incompatible with right conceptions of the Divine Being—they are impeachments of the honour of our highest Sovereign—and, hence, necessary as they might seem, and useful as, it is supposed, they might prove, we are bound, *in limine*, to refuse them a hearing.

The principal force of this objection lies in the vagueness and generality of the ideas which it expresses. The ideas themselves are true enough, but their precise point of contact with the case in hand is not very scientifically made out. In meeting the objection, we propose adhering to the plan upon which we have, throughout this volume, attempted to proceed. We shall not essay to negative it—but endeavour, by a clear description of the position against which it is meant to apply, to show that whatever of really pertinent truth there is in it tells in favour of, rather than in opposition to, a miraculous attestation of a revealed faith; and that, in other respects, it misses the mark. We think this is to be done by placing before the reader, in the first instance, an accurate representation of what a miracle is, and showing wherein the process by which it is effected differs from the customary processes of Nature. This done, we shall examine this difference in its relation to the ascertained principles on which God rules the operations of the physical universe, and see how far it is in harmony with them, and how far discrepant. And, then, lastly, we shall look upon the still remaining discrepancy, if there be any, in the light of those higher and more comprehensive laws by which the All-wise Creator regulates the affairs of his moral administration. And, as we build up this argument into one consistent whole, we are not without hopes of showing that

God has taken abundantly more care of his own character than the foregoing objection, placed side by side with the historical evidence in support of miracles, would appear, at first blush, to imply.

§ 11. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MIRACLE AND A PROCESS OF NATURE.

Our first business is to compare together two things—a change produced in conformity with the established laws of Nature, and a change produced by miracle—and mark off, as accurately as we are able, the specific difference between the two. We shall start with that compassed by natural means.

God wills an effect—that is, a given change in a given disposition of matter is to be brought about in order to make it correspond, for the time being, and for the purpose had in view, with His determination respecting it. In the order of Nature, God's will takes its course to that effect through an intervening chain of antecedents and sequents, more or less extended, having a greater or smaller number of links, as the case may be—and it *invariably* takes this course, and *no other*. We can, perhaps, most vividly apprehend the idea here presented to us, in connexion with mechanical motion. Suppose an object at rest—suppose a reason, operating somewhere, no matter where, for the removal of that object to the distance of a yard from where it stands—the removal, if effected at all, is to be effected by power emanating, in the first instance, from the will of the Supreme, and transmitted by means of various mechanical contrivances to the object sought to be displaced. For example—the book upon A.'s table is to be lifted to his bookshelf, by A. himself. Now let us watch so much of the process as may be sufficient to illustrate the point now under notice. Well then, A.'s will has first of all to be determined by a preponderating motive—having been determined, energy of some sort has to be communicated through various nerves, which energy, for the purpose here specified, may be regarded as the steam power of the machine. A pressure of a given amount is thus brought to bear upon some portion of the muscular system, and muscular force having been applied, in conformity with



certain pre-established laws, to the book, it is forthwith transferred to the position in which A.'s will had determined to place it. Now what we wish to fix attention upon in the illustration is this. Between the original will and the result, there is always interposed, in the order of Nature, a definite succession of what we usually designate causes and effects, but which, so far as we know, are nothing more than foreordained antecedents and sequents, each of which must be in its proper position in relation to the next, each being the sequent of some given antecedent, and in turn becoming the antecedent to a given sequent, until the last sequent is reached, which is the end that was to be effected. The first antecedent in the series is the will of God—not, indeed, in the sense of desiring or approving of the specific result, but in the sense of having determined that it shall be attainable, under all circumstances and for whatever moral purpose, through the fixed succession of antecedents and sequents, previously established by him. And the physical change which we are contemplating as having been effected in conformity with the order of Nature, is merely the last sequent in the chain along which the will of God invariably travels, in order to establish an exact correspondence between the disposition of matter, in any given instance, and the determination of the Divine mind, as expressed by the laws of matter.

A miracle differs from a natural event in this—that between the last sequent and the first antecedent, more or less of the chain is dropped—mostly, the greater part of it—sometimes the whole. Thus in the miracles effected by Jesus Christ, his will becomes the next antecedent to the last sequent, and the will of God, instead of passing on through the established succession, as it would have done by means of natural law, overleaps, as it were, all the antecedents and sequents between Christ's determination and the result, and exhibits the efficient power in the last sequent only. Here the greater portion of the chain is dispensed with. But in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the entire intervening line of antecedents and sequents is set aside, and the first antecedent, the will of God, has for its next and only sequent, the resuscitation of our Lord's lifeless body.



We believe this to be a true and accurate statement of the specific difference between a process of Nature and a miracle. The first antecedent and the last sequent are the same in both cases—the only difference being that they are linked together at a different point. In other words, the efficient power is the same—the result is the same—but the intervening mechanism by which the one works to the other is *not* the same—in a miracle, very much of it, and sometimes all, being left out.

§ 12. NATURAL ANTECEDENTS AND SEQUENTS CONNECTED ONLY BY  
DIVINE ORDINATION.

Now so far as human research has hitherto extended, it has never been able to make out that there is any inherent virtue in any given antecedent to associate it with its immediate sequent, beyond the simple ordination of God that the one should immediately follow the other. In a chain of nine links, for example, philosophy has never yet succeeded in discovering a reason why the fourth link should be connected with the fifth, rather than with the sixth or ninth, beyond the simple fact that it is so. The practical value of the connexion cannot be found in the things connected, nor in the essential adaptation of the one to the other, but appears to reside exclusively in the law which originally put them together. They cannot be ascertained to have any other natural or necessary relation one to another than that subsisting between one step and another in a given line of march. Neither *produces* the other, but each is *on the way* to the next, in the order of *position* only, which order has been determined by Infinite Wisdom. So that if it had been originally settled that the will of God, or the efficient power, should travel to a given physical result by an entirely different chain of antecedents and sequents from that by which it now travels, so as that some of the existing links should have been transposed, and some omitted, there is nothing in the essential nature of the things themselves, at least so far as we have been able to perceive, to have prohibited the arrangement. When, therefore, as in a miracle, the will of God reaches the last sequent by an omission of a long succession of what we have been accustomed to call causes and effects, it violates nothing, it displaces nothing, it

has to overcome nothing, *necessarily* pertaining to the things omitted, save and except the original ordination which placed them in a certain relative order between itself and the result. There is no *force* set aside, or contradicted—but merely an alteration of the *conditions* under which the force is developed, which conditions are supposed in the case of a miracle, equally as in that of a natural event, to be an expression, for the time being, of the mind of God. If, therefore, there is any unfitness in a miraculous work, considered as such, the reason of the unfitness must be sought, not in the essential nature of things themselves, but in the Divine nature. The real question mooted by the preceding strain of observation will then shape itself somewhat thus—God having pre-ordained conditions under which force shall pass from antecedent to sequent in his material creation, is it inconsistent with the general *principles* of that physical system which he has established, that those conditions should in any case be varied—and if there is herein any deviation from those principles, to what extent does it proceed, and how far is it in keeping with his character, and with his moral government? This question we now proceed to discuss.

#### § 13. LAW SUBORDINATE TO LAW IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD.

We start with the obvious remark, that alteration in the conditions regulating the passage of efficient power from antecedent to sequent, is not *per se* a departure from the principles on which the physical universe is governed. One law of nature is very frequently suspended, superseded, or counteracted, by another. For example, by the settled ordination of the Creator, the centrifugal motion of the earth is the antecedent of which the sequent, if allowed to follow in due course, should be the flying off of a stone from the earth's surface. But it is certain that until further force be applied, the stone does not fly off. The conditions on which centrifugal force shall be followed by a flying off of loose particles from the surface of a revolving body are not only present but operative—but, nevertheless, the fore-ordained sequent does not succeed its proper antecedent—the stone still keeps its place. Why? Simply

that another set of conditions has been introduced—the law of gravitation—the result of which is the modification of the first set of conditions in such wise that the efficient power no longer passes from antecedent to sequent in the original line. Mere alteration therefore, of an established connexion between antecedent and sequent, so far from being incompatible with God's original plan, is a part of it, and is being perpetually exemplified in innumerable particulars. Law is subordinate to law—and one train of causes and effects is set aside by another. So that we may advance thus far towards the settlement of the question we have undertaken to discuss—no alteration of the conditions under which efficient power travels from antecedent to sequent, *which is brought about by the force of another succession of antecedents and sequents*, is incompatible with God's plan of regulating the processes of Nature. Otherwise and more popularly stated, the suspension or counteraction of a law in physics, if only produced by another law in physics, is no deviation from God's principles of physical government. So that the objection to miracles is, not that they exhibit a suspension or counteraction of established natural laws—but that the suspension or counteraction is not the result of a power operating through the medium of some higher and dominant laws in the natural world.

§ 14. THE OBVIOUS PURPOSES OF PHYSICAL LAWS COMPLIED WITH,  
AND FURTHERED, BY MIRACLES.

A further step in the argument may be taken on ground equally firm. The arrangement of the Divine operations in the physical world into an invariable succession of antecedents and sequents, popularly designated “the established laws of Nature,” is not an original and inherent necessity, nor was it made simply for its *own* sake—at least, our powers of mind have not yet been able to detect any sign of it. We can perceive a relation of this arrangement to our convenience, and to the education of our intelligence, from which relation we infer the Divine purpose. We can readily enough apprehend that life would have been to us, and, indeed, to all creatures, a very unmeaning thing, a mere series of unconnected chances, but



for this same uninterrupted constancy of physical antecedents and sequents—or, perhaps, it will be more obvious to remark, that upon this uninterrupted constancy are based all our existing facilities, and even possibilities, of development. If the arteries and veins in which the *vis divina*, or the efficient power, perpetually circulates throughout the material universe were not accurately mapped out for us, down to their minutest ramifications—or if, having been once published they were subject to any shiftings, like some of the quicksands that lie off our coast—or if any element of uncertainty had been infused, forbidding us to build our calculations on the conclusion that what has once happened will, under the same circumstances, happen again, and happen with undeviating uniformity—it is difficult to imagine how conscious existence could have expanded at all. Action proceeding from within there could have been none. We could neither have sown nor reaped—erected dwellings nor occupied them—we could in no sense have ministered to the supply of our own wants. All knowledge, all reasoning, all virtue, would have lacked a *που στῶ*—a sure basis on which to rest. To *us*, therefore, to the development of what we are, a relation to established physical laws is a necessity—and in this necessity we read their purpose. But surely, there is something beyond this in the order of nature—some higher end to be compassed by it. In the exquisite elaboration of that order—in the infinite complexity which characterises it—and, if we may so say, in the long-drawn-out path, and the multiplicity of differing steps into which it is divided, by which the will of God passes on to those every-day results with which we are most familiar—there is clearly a detailed manifestation of himself—a step-by-step exposition of his perfections—a progressive series of lessons on the Divine nature—beautifully adapted to our infantine intelligence, and separating into the smallest fragments the materials of nourishment to be absorbed into our mental system. Can we err, then, in concluding that God's purpose in arranging the plan of the physical universe was two-fold—to meet the actual wants of our being, and to embody, in forms suited to our apprehensions, certain views of Himself?



Against neither aspect of this purpose does a miracle militate—in regard to neither can it be justly said to disturb or overrule God's *principles* of proceeding, so far as they can be gathered from the entire system of laws he has himself established. It cannot be alleged, with the smallest show of plausibility, that the miracles of Christ and his apostles, even if accepted as facts, introduce any element of uncertainty into those of our calculations which are founded on the constancy of nature, or ever did. The feeding of thousands on five barley loaves and two small fishes had no practical tendency to mislead men as to the ordinary conditions under which such food is to be produced or obtained, nor to raise a single doubt as to the proportion of food ordinarily necessary to the satisfaction of man's appetite. The restoration of the withered arm, the cleansing of ten lepers, and the giving of sight to the man born blind, may be believed on historic evidence, without in any degree disturbing the decisions of physiological or medical science. These rare exceptions to the constancy of physical laws, happening, moreover, as they are supposed to have done, in connexion with a unique purpose seeming to explain and justify them, do not in any way unsettle our knowledge of, or enervate our confidence in, the rule which they infringe. The man who admits, and the man who rejects them, occupy the same intellectual position in regard to established physical laws. They are not less intently, with not less docility, studied, and relied upon, by the former than by the latter—and no one in his senses dreams of paying regard to miracles as a law of knowledge or of life. So far, then, as the invariableness of antecedent and sequent is necessary to the guidance of our being in what pertains to its present accommodation and evolution, its purpose is left uninterfered with by any exhibition of God through the medium of supernatural performances. No contrariety is apparent—nor can it be pretended that the ordinary and the extraordinary are at variance as to the end aimed at by each respectively. But when we consider the other aspect of God's purpose towards us in the establishment of physical laws, we discern, not only that it is not counteracted by that of miracles, but that the end of both is concurrent, nay !

identical. They are but different methods of reaching the same result—the showing forth of God—but different mechanisms through which we look at the same object—the microscope and the telescope of the spiritual world; this, laying bare to our minds its multiplicity of details; that, bringing nigh to our apprehensions, convictions, and sympathies what might else have appeared remote. He who communicates instruction concerning himself by means of fixed laws, may surely be suitably conceived of when communicating instruction by means of rare deviations from those laws—more especially if, in the judgment of reason, the chief end of those laws was to shadow forth his being and attributes, and if their secondary and subordinate end—namely, our guidance through this life, is in no manner interrupted by his occasional substitution of the one method for the other. The teacher who ordinarily employs letter-press as a medium of imparting knowledge to his pupils, can hardly be said to deviate from the tuitional principles on which he is acting, although sometimes he should resort to a picture, as being better adapted to his immediate object. Every one will see that he is doing the same thing, but by a different process—and none would think of taking exception to this alteration of method, on the ground of its subjecting the teacher to a charge of inconsistency.

The order and processes of the physical world may be regarded as the *publication*, in the works of his hands, of God's mind and intentions in relation to everything pertaining to himself and to his government, capable of being thus expressed. In instituting them, however, and in making this publication, he did not preclude his right to show himself to his creatures in some other mode, if suitable to his object. He was under no obligation, either in wisdom or propriety, to print upon the surface of his material universe *all* the patterns according to which his after proceedings should be shaped—nor are we warranted in inferring that a certain mode of action ascribed to him could not have constituted part of his original plan, simply because it has not been expressed by fixed physical laws. It might have been held in reserve—and it might, by

being held in reserve, serve the same purpose for which those laws are intended, but in a more effectual manner. Miracles, it is true, are not written down in the published *programme* of the Divine government of his natural domain. Had they been so, they would have thereby lost their whole significance. They could not have indicated the presence of the Supreme in express attestation of a specific moral purpose, but *as* miracles—they could not have been at the same time miracles and ordinances of nature—they could not have been expressed in the original plan of which the physical universe is the realization, except in the shape of law to us and to our judgment, and thus losing their teaching character and aptitude. If ever they were to be at all, they could only be as representatives of the hitherto *unpublished* will of God in respect of the disposition of matter—for if found in the book of nature, their very purport, their *only* purport, would be destroyed. No one, therefore, has a right to speak of miracles as an after-thought of God compared with the plan which he has imprinted on the page of creation—nor as a proceeding having to human reason a necessary seeming of being such. They may be more fitly described as insertions made, at particular junctures of time, in the published *programme*—insertions which, though arbitrary to us, and to the means of knowledge within our reach, are not arbitrary so far as the will of God is concerned—and the very arbitrariness of whose occurrence is precisely the feature of them which speaks the needed message to our souls.

The whole objection which led the way to these observations, has arisen from losing sight of the clear distinction that obtains between principles of action, and modes of acting. The difference may be thus illustrated. Let it be supposed that the education of its subjects is a leading principle of the government of Great Britain, and that laws are passed, and monies voted, with a view to give a practical form to that principle. In general, it would be correct to affirm of taxes on the materials of instruction, proved to operate in the way of restricting the diffusion of knowledge, that they were departures from the professed principle of the government in question. But



if it could be made out—a not very probable supposition it must be admitted—that a penny stamp on newspapers increases the true educational power at work in the land, by securing a much higher style of political tuition, and that it is imposed for that purpose—the tax which stands in direct opposition to the school, as a *mode of acting*, would be in complete harmony with it considered as giving effect to a *principle of action*. The end supposed to be had in view in both is one and the same—a suitable education of the people—and whenever the people shall have arrived at that higher stage of intellectual culture at which their own good sense may be imagined to guarantee a demand for the best possible order of political literature, and the restrictive operation of the stamp is counterbalanced by no advantages not to be otherwise obtained, then the same principle of action which dictated its imposition would dictate its removal, and would furnish the explanation of two opposite modes of giving utterance to the same purpose. By bearing steadily in mind this very obvious distinction, a great many crude opinions on the subject of the Divine government might have been avoided. Miracles differ very essentially from the established laws of nature, but they argue no change in the main intent of God's proceedings. Their appearance in the world's history at special periods only, and their absence from all the rest, marks, not an alteration in the principle of the Divine actions, but merely an adaptation to circumstances of the Divine method of acting. Granted, that the uniform constancy of physical laws, and the achievement of a miracle, or, in other words, a deviation from that constancy, are modes of proceeding in diametrical opposition to each other, it does not follow that they must necessarily result from any variation of original purpose. They are not more contradictory the one of the other than tax and no tax. And if God's purpose be the education and development of all the faculties and all the sensibilities with which he has endowed us, his mode of acting will vary as our need varies, and he will do or not do, act in conformity with his published law, or depart from the observance of that law, just as his Infinite wisdom may see fit. The seeming changes in Him



are in reality only changes in the position from which we view Him. The apparently contrary modes of proceeding result from the action of the same will upon different materials. The light which streams in upon us through the stained window of the cathedral may be here crimson, and there blue, here shaded, there clear and bright—but it is the same beam which, passing through all, gives to all their beauty to our eyes. And so, in the language of the profoundly philosophic Paul, “There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”

Miracles, then, are not necessarily departures from any of the principles upon which God is known to conduct his government of the physical universe. So far as yet appears, they *may* only be a different mode of arriving at the same end which reason instructs us to regard as the principal end contemplated in the institution and publication of all natural laws. And if so, is there any one predominant feature in God’s moral administration, having due regard to which, we shall be justified in regarding a miraculous attestation of Christ’s peculiar mission to men as not only a necessary part of that mission, and as contributing a large amount of moral force towards its success, but also as in perfect keeping with all that we know of God’s intentions towards man, and with the high destiny for which he is obviously training him? That is to say, can we discern a purpose of his in relation to ourselves, the furtherance of which, by supernatural displays of his Almighty power, would commend to our reason such deviations from fixed natural laws, as being, in the largest and fullest sense, worthy of his exalted and glorious character? We believe we can—and we hasten to submit the grounds of that belief in as concise a compass as possible.

§ 15. THE HIGHEST ENDS OF GOD’S MORAL GOVERNMENT SUBSERVED  
BY MIRACLES.

It will not, we apprehend, be disputed that the highest conceivable end capable of being contemplated by God’s government of man, is the assimilation of the man to God. All who admit the being of God at all—and with such only have we

any argument—admit likewise that his must be the most perfect form of being. Hence nothing can be imagined worthier of him—no outgoings of his will, and power, and goodness, towards his intelligent creatures, can be supposed to aim at a higher purpose—than that of raising them, in all respects in which their natures will allow of it, into a state of likeness to himself. We are endowed with an animal nature—and the life of which, as mere animals, we are the embodiment, places us a step higher up in the succession of created being, than that which, like the vegetable world, is lacking in the attribute of self-consciousness. We are intelligent beings—and the powers of thought, reflection, reasoning, imagination, which distinguish us from other animals around us, place us somewhat nearer than them to Him whose throne is established over all. But we are more than this. We have a capacity to perceive and appreciate, and respond to, other ideas than those merely which are to be *understood*—we can also find satisfaction in those which address themselves to our *approval*—such as truth, justice, goodness, and the like—and this capacity we instinctively regard as having in it a higher excellence than the knowing faculty, and as bringing us still closer to the highest and most perfect form of being. To associate these ideas with God—to see in them the reflection of his excellence—to be consciously in sympathy with him in all that relates to them—to approve where he approves—to condemn where he condemns—to be at one with him in will touching these things—so at one with him as that our governing affections shall repose where his will reposes, and because it reposes there—is the highest development of our nature of which we can imagine it capable, inasmuch as it is a correspondence of our nature with that of God, over the broadest surface in relation to which agreement between them is possible. Whatever there is of God in the works of his hands, or the movements of his government, or the revelation by his Providence, of his character and purpose, apprehended by a sympathizing mind, is SPIRITUAL life. We are made partakers of the Divine nature, by possessing ourselves of that which is Divine in his acts and truths. He who recognises God's wisdom, has within himself the wisdom of

God to the whole extent of that recognition. He who sympathizes with God's purity, has within himself the purity of God to the whole extent of that sympathy. Spiritual life is God in the soul up to the measure of the soul's present capacity.

This, then, is plainly the highest style of life for which we have any known adaptation—and the development of this in us must needs be the highest, that is, the dominant, end of God's government of us. All that he does, he does to give maturity to the germs of being and happiness which he has implanted in his creatures. His proceedings are, in all cases, in accordance with his purpose—and his purpose is disclosed by the powers he has conferred. Man is capable of a spiritual life, and in that life approaches most closely to his Maker. Must it not, then, be *the* principle of God's moral administration, so far as it respects man, to fulfil in him the best aptitudes of his nature? And if so, must not that which is inferior be made to subserve that which is superior? We might show, if it were really necessary, that such is the fact. We might prove that all the arrangements of that economy of which man is the centre, point with unerring consistency to his spiritualization as their end. Falling short of this, he evidently falls short of what he was designed for—of what everything around him, if allowed free scope, is tending to make him. But if this be the main purport of his existence, it ought to be steadily kept in view when we are pronouncing judgment on any actual or assumed proceedings of God with regard to him. As "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," so the order and processes of Nature were established for him, and not he for them. Mind is higher than matter—and the laws of matter were laid down with an exclusive view to the interests of mind. Whether, therefore, they can ever be departed from with propriety, is a question which resolves itself into another—whether the spiritual life of man can be best promoted thereby. Simple adherence to law, when the ends of law cannot be obtained by it, indicates anything but perfection. Law is not its own end—and to make it such is what amongst men we characterise as pedantry. The strictest obedience to law, as every sensible person knows, sometimes



consists in its infraction—and no man is more certainly or more justly charged with narrow-mindedness, than he who persists in binding himself to a rule, when the spirit of that rule is violated by such persistence. Why, therefore, are we to regard that as a perfection in God, which we designate imperfection in a fellow-creature? Why should not the physical be made subservient to the spiritual? To us, there would appear to be no reasonable reply to this inquiry. The conclusion, therefore, to which we are conducted may be thus stated—A revelation of God to man by means of a human life, necessary, as we have shown, to the full development of our spiritual nature, can only be completed and authenticated by an infusion into it of the supernatural element, which, besides proving the revelation itself, adds largely to its moral power with the bulk of mankind. So far as we know anything of the principles of God's government, we can discover nothing peremptorily forbidding this miraculous attestation. On the contrary, we have good reason to believe that it will be vouchsafed, inasmuch as the purpose which calls for it is the highest purpose of the Supreme in relation to man, and will, therefore, subordinate to itself whatever is merely secondary to it. In one word, if miracles will subserve our spiritual life, there is no obvious reason in the principles of the Divine administration, either in its physical or moral aspect, why miracles should not be performed.

#### § 16. CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES—MR. HUME'S SOPHISM.

The above objection having been disposed of, we are confronted with another. Enlightened intellect, we are told, still demurs to any acceptance of a miraculous attestation of Christ's mission. Admitting the necessity of miracles to authenticate a manifestation of God to our religious nature by means of a human life—admitting that they are calculated to impart a peculiar force to that manifestation—and admitting that they involve no violation of the principles on which God has based his government of the world, natural or moral—it yet remains to be considered whether a miracle can be so sustained by evidence as to render it credible. Modern scepticism decides



that it cannot. The grounds on which this decision rests were discovered by the historian Hume, and are now familiar to every one who has gone into an examination, on either side, of the question at issue. These it will be convenient summarily to state. Experience, he says, is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact. Variable experience gives rise to probability only—uniform experience amounts to proof. “Our belief of any fact from the testimony of eye-witnesses is derived from no other principle than our experience of the veracity of human testimony. If the fact attested be miraculous, there arises a contest of two opposite experiences, or proof against proof. Now a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as complete as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined; and if so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever derived from human testimony.”\*

Whether Mr. Hume meant this for a philosophical exposition, or propounded it merely as a logical puzzle, concerns us but little. That it *is* the latter only, can scarcely fail to be the first impression it makes upon a sober judgment. For, if it be true that our belief in matters of fact is based on experience alone—and that our experience of the constancy of natural laws gives rise to certainty, whereas our experience of human testimony gives rise to probability only—it is difficult to account for the glaring fact that men in all ages have been so ready to accept the probability against the certainty. They *have* believed in miracles notwithstanding their experience of the uniform constancy of Nature’s laws, and they *have* believed in them on human testimony notwithstanding their experience of its variableness. To start therefore with a philosophy of belief which is clearly opposed to a full tide of facts, strikes one as a somewhat daring commencement of an intellectual display. Mr. Hume undertakes to lay down for us the law of rational belief, either as *it is*, or as it *ought to be*. If the former, where is his induction of facts? if the latter,

\* Encyclopædia Britannica, vol. i. art. *Abridgment*.

where is his authority? The usual method of philosophy is to generalise the facts which fall under its notice, and then to give to that generalization the name of law. If Mr. Hume had undertaken to analyze for us the passion of jealousy, and to lay down the laws by which it is governed, he would probably have thought it incumbent on him to collect within view the historical facts which illustrate the workings of jealousy, and to deduce his inferences from the facts as they stood. Otherwise, his readers might very justly have objected, that his theory was representative, not of the thing as embodied in human experience, but merely of the thing as conceived of by Mr. Hume's imagination. Why he, or any of his disciples, should be allowed to handle more unceremoniously and dogmatically the laws of human belief—what authority he or they can show for laying down those laws in the teeth of an overwhelming body of facts—and how it comes to pass that he and they should arrogate a sort of exclusive claim to an intellectual philosophy, for supplying us with a *rationale* of the phenomenon of human belief, by means of the ancient and exploded conjectural method, in the place of the tentative and inductive—are questions well worth considering before we surrender up our common sense to his very ingenious sophism. That men generally—men of disciplined minds, as well as men of rude and uncultured intellect—have been disposed to give credit to human testimony in favour of miracles, is surely a fact which ought to be taken into account in any attempt to deduce the laws which govern human belief. It does not prove miracles to be true—but it does prove that men's mode of arriving at a conclusion respecting them is not, and cannot be, by balancing a probability against a certainty—it does prove that whatever philosophers may think *ought* to be the process of the mind in forming its beliefs, that process actually *is* something very different. What is common to all classes in their mental operations is, in most cases, set down to the constitution of man's nature. If the great majority of mankind, learned and unlearned—all, indeed, but a gifted few who look at everything in this world and the next through a syllogistic medium—persist in listening to testimony in cases in which the estab-

lished laws of Nature directly oppose it, it seems more probable by far that they should be unconsciously governed by some innate rule of credence, than that a handful of very acute reasoners should be correct in asserting that they are all violating the laws of their own being, and stifling the clearest voice of reason in their souls. At any rate, they who tell us without qualification that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact—the basis on which they rest a grave imputation on the rationality of the world's actual belief—ought to offer us something more than bare assertion in support of their *dictum*. Is it not just possible, seeing the state of facts in regard to this theory, that the theory itself may be crude or erroneous? Ought not a pretended law, which is so entirely out of joint with its own phenomena, to be received, if received at all, with uncommon caution, and not without searching inquiry as to what ultimate authority it represents? At present we decide nothing on this point—but we merely express what probably most men feel in making their first acquaintance with this celebrated argument, that the blank opposition in which the theory stands to facts, gives it an air of unreality, deprives it of all practical weight, and, as we have already said, starts a doubt whether it is propounded as a philosophical result, or as a logical puzzle.

Mr. Hume's syllogism, which, at first sight, looks clear as crystal without a single flaw, is, however, translucent of truth to those minds only which look through it at one particular angle. Shift the position ever so little, and instantly it becomes opaque. As an argument against an imaginary case it is complete—as an argument against the miracles of Christianity, it is impertinent. He professes to put in opposite scales, poised by human reason, two kinds of experience, that he may ascertain their comparative weight—that of the constancy of Nature, which, being unalterable, gives rise to certainty—and that of the trustworthiness of human testimony, which, being variable, gives rise to probability only—and, as a matter of course, the latter kicks the beam to the former. But if we take each of these experiences, and examine them apart, one by one, we shall find they are neither of them deposited



in the scale in that state which fairness to the argument absolutely requires. For example, it is implied, that our knowledge of, and confidence in, the unchangeableness of physical laws, is the result of our *experience* only of the operation of those laws. But it is no such thing. The greater, and by far the heavier proportion of that knowledge, was contributed by human testimony—for what can we know of other men's experience as to the processes of Nature but what they choose to tell us? and what would be the strength of our assurance in favour of the invariableness of these processes as against the veracity of testimony, if we did not add to what we have ourselves seen, heard, and felt, that also which *we are told* all men, in all parts of the world, and in all ages, have seen, heard, and felt? Is it not rather a barefaced trick to filch from the scale of human testimony so considerable an amount of what fairly belongs to it, and cast it into the scale to which it does not belong, with a view to depreciate the value of the one as weighed against the other? Let it be conceded, that our strength of conviction as to the constancy of natural laws is immensely augmented by the consistent testimony of all foregoing ages, and it will be at once apparent that in the question of miracles what our reason has to weigh in the scale against human testimony, is not our own experience only, but the agreement of a large body of concurrent testimony with that experience—and thus the seemingly preponderant weight in the scale is ascribable not to the actual unchangeableness of physical laws, as established by our experience in regard to it, but to our belief in that unchangeableness derived from the harmony of general testimony with individual experience. Now let us examine what Mr. Hume puts into the opposite scale. Our experience of human testimony, he says, which is variable, leads us to probability only. The proposition is true if you look at it along one line of vision—Mr. Hume's line—but change your stand-point and the truth of it disappears. What one man testifies relating to a matter of fact, our own experience teaches us to estimate as amounting to no more than probability—he may be attempting to impose upon us, or he may himself have been imposed upon.



This degree of uncertainty in one man's testimony to another comes within the cognizance of every one's experience. But then this is not an accurate description of the relation of Christian miracles to our belief. It ought to be put thus—The concurrent testimony of several witnesses of good character to a matter of fact appealing to their bodily senses, which fact, if true, is indicative of a high moral purpose, and which concurrent testimony was consistently adhered to unto death itself, our experience has taught us to regard as amounting to probability only. Now, we ask, whose experience has affirmed the variability of human testimony in a case like this? If this concurrent testimony given to us under such conditions be false, then we say the falsehood of it is at variance with all our experience of human testimony. So that the whole trial amounts to this—In the one scale experience is in agreement with testimony, and hence our belief in the constancy of Nature—In the other scale experience is in agreement with testimony, and hence our belief in the miracles of Christianity. So far as experience shapes our belief, it is not a certainty against a probability that we have to consider—but a certainty against a certainty. Does a change of the processes of the physical world contradict our experience of their inviolability? Not more, we answer, than the falsehood of testimony deposed under the above conditions contradicts our experience of its reliableness. If we are bound to reject miracles lest the belief based upon experience should be shocked, we are equally bound not to reject the kind of testimony which we have in support of Christ's miracles lest the belief based upon experience should be also shocked. So that if experience is our only guide of reasoning concerning matters of fact, experience in this instance conducts us to two opposite conclusions. For if our experience, fortified by general testimony, knows nothing of variation in the laws of nature, so our experience, fortified by general testimony, knows nothing of variation in the truthfulness of testimony such as is given in support of the gospel narrative. Here is proof against proof, and experience alone is plainly unable to make out which is the weightier. Were Mr. Hume's premises true, therefore, the advocates of divine

revelation have as good a right to their conclusion from it as have the sceptics to theirs. But they are not true, as we shall now go on to show. They are preposterously erroneous. Human belief as to matters of fact does not come by experience only—perhaps, not mainly. Mr. Hume has misstated the laws of faith to suit his purpose. And this is the secret of his fallacy. He and those who think with him look straight along a tubular theory, and see something at the end of it which they protest is the only thing discernible. So it is to those who confine themselves to the tube—but to those who stand by, and avail themselves of all the powers of mental vision with which God has endowed them, there are also things on the right hand and on the left, of which that seen through the tube is but a part, and which give all its significance and homogeneity to that part.

It has already been pointed out by Dr. Campbell, that our belief in testimony does *not* arise out of our experience of its general veracity. Children who have had no such experience believe most implicitly that which is told them by others, and if experience has any hand in their belief, it is to limit its proportions rather than develope them. The tendency of the mind to believe is born with us, not acquired—and knowledge, as it is attained, serves but to guide it in its course. But when a statement of facts, involving in them some moral quality or purpose, is submitted to us for credence, our faith in it is governed much more powerfully by the congruity of that quality or purpose with our moral sense, than by the testimony by which the statement is supported. Perhaps, there are few men whose own history does not furnish some illustration of this remark. A. has been tenderly attached to B., in whose high-souled honour and integrity of character he has that confidence which only intimate fellowship can inspire. Circumstances throw them into different spheres, but between the two such a correspondence is maintained, as serves to keep alive the sympathy of one soul with another. It happens, however, that some report reaches the ears of A., reflecting the grossest discredit on his friend. He rejects that report with indignation as unfounded, and, rather with a view to vindicate

B. from a calumny, than to set at rest any misgivings of his own, he undertakes to sift the matter to the bottom. As he proceeds in his investigation, facts turn up one after another of the most suspicious aspect, and link after link is added to the chain of evidence which, in the minds of dispassionate spectators, clearly connects B. with the charge imputed to him. His friend, however, although sorely perplexed, refuses to believe. What is it that he falls back upon? Facts are against him, and so far as his experience goes, such facts ought to govern his belief. But they do not. He cannot point out where their inconclusiveness can be detected—he cannot discover any other key to them but that supplied by B's guilt. But he feels certain that there is a mistake somewhere—that there is an explanation which would otherwise solve the mystery. His belief takes its stand firmly upon knowledge of character—and his own moral instincts assure him that the character he has seen in his friend never could give birth to an act such as that which is seemingly proved against him. Now, whether he be right or wrong in his estimate of B's character, matters not to our present purpose—but given the character, and A's belief concerning its expression in the imputed act of dishonour is governed not by experience, but by moral instinct. This suits not that, he feels rather than argues, unless his moral sense deals falsely with him—and the utter absence of congruity between the moral tone of his friend's mind and the deed apparently brought home to him, is the basis upon which his faith in B's innocence deliberately rests, in spite of his experience of the general dependence which may be placed on circumstantial evidence. Our great dramatist well understood how faith may be governed, even in relation to matters of fact, by moral congruities, when he made Hamlet reply to Horatio's statement of the reason which had induced him to leave Wittenberg for Elsinore—

“ I would not have your enemy say so,  
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence,  
To make it truster of your own report  
Against yourself—”



and when he represented Imogen, in answer to Iachimo's slanders on her lord, holding her judgment in suspense—

“If this be true  
*(As I have such a heart that both mine ears  
 Must not in haste abuse)*, if it be true,  
 How shall I be revenged?”

In like manner our belief in miracles will represent not alone our dependence on the veracity of human testimony, but the response of our reason to the purpose for which the miracles were professedly wrought. If that purpose is deemed eminently befitting the Creator, and in beautiful keeping with all that is known of his moral perfections, so much the readier and the firmer will be our faith—whereas, if no purpose at all be apparent, or none worthy of the power to which the miracles are ascribed, so much the more difficult is it for us to believe in them. It is puerile to charge us with arriving at our conclusions by a process which logic condemns, when such *is* the process by which human belief is shaped in spite of itself. There is not a sceptic now living who would not feel justified in arguing against the reality of mediæval ecclesiastical miracles, on the ground either that they had no purpose, or a bad one, and in feeling that the argument was valid, and would have weight with a reasonable mind. But if this be so, then is it tacitly admitted that congruity of purpose in supernatural displays of power is an element, and a proper element, in our belief of them.\* Nor is there here any such logical impertinence as arguing in a circle. We do not first make this the proof of that, and then that of this—the miracle of the purpose, and then the purpose of the miracle. We put them together, and we find them agree in the same conclusion; and of that agreement our faith is born. As if an individual should come to us with a message from a friend, the purport of which is in perfect keeping with his character, but still extraordinary enough to need confirmation. The messenger

\* The author of “The Restoration of Belief” has put this point with great force—but the point itself, and the illustration of it, having been in our memoranda previously to the appearance of this very able work, we do not feel bound to omit them.



exhibits a ring which we know to belong to our friend, and which, we are sure, would not have been entrusted to a mere stranger—and looking both at the nature of the message, and at the token of confirmation, we believe. The ring would have been an insufficient credential had the message been at variance with the known character of the man represented as sending it—the message would have been insufficient, even if consonant with that character, without some sure token in the stranger's hand that it came from him—but where both meet, the proof is held to be satisfactory, and belief is instantly yielded. Our faith, then, in matters of fact, having a moral significance, does not rest alone upon our experience of the veracity of human testimony. Our moral sense, as well as our understanding, is addressed, and our responsive faith is the combined result of both.

Mr. Hume has either mistaken or misstated the origin of human belief. It is a primary, not a secondary, process of the mind. It is prior to experience, not a result of it. An act of belief, like an act of love, springs out of a felt congruity between an innate tendency, and an external object. Experience only corrects it—restricts its exercises—contracts the circle of its flights. We have an inborn aptitude for the supernatural, just as we have an inborn aptitude for the moral—and our faith, in the fresh morning of its life, is unbounded. Our nursery tales, so full of absurdities and impossibilities, are accepted by our yet undisciplined minds as veritable histories. So, in the infancy of nations, earth is always supposed to teem with supernatural marvels. There is plainly, therefore, an element of our nature adapting it to acquiesce in the miraculous. In children and ignorant people, this instinct, like all others, seeks gratification indiscriminately, and accepts for nutriment whatever is externally correspondent with it, by whomsoever, and under whatsoever circumstances proffered. Experience serves to guide it—to point out to it all the marks by which fictitious supernaturalism may be detected—to winnow the chaff from the grain—but is in no wise a substitute for it. It no more eradicates the instinct itself than it destroys the appetite for food which in early life, and uncorrected by

experience, contentedly preys on garbage. The comparatively ready assent given to the miracles of Christianity by the majority of those who have been brought into acquaintance with the New Testament narratives of them, cannot be explained on any other hypothesis than a correspondence between them and the fundamental laws of human belief. If experience be, indeed, the sole basis of our faith, how is the foregoing fact to be accounted for? The philosophy contradicts the phenomenon, whereas the phenomenon ought to suggest the philosophy. We prefer a *rationale* which does less violence to the laws of our own being. We see, in the first place, an instinctive tendency to accept human testimony—we see, in the second place, a natural aptitude to recognise moral purpose in facts which embody it, and to make the congruity of that purpose with our own moral sense an element in our final judgment of their probability—and we see, in the last place, an innate disposition for the supernatural. All these we regard as primary laws of human nature, with which experience has nothing to do but to correct in their excesses, and guide in their operations. And, finally, we see in the miracles of Christ and his apostles, an objective whole answering to all three of these natural aptitudes of humanity—supernaturalism, having a moral purpose, vouched for by testimony. And hence, general belief. The miracles may or may not be true. The testimony may or may not be trustworthy. The purpose may or may not be congruous with our moral sense. The supernaturalism may or may not be clearly defined and aptly embodied. All this will depend upon appropriate and specific evidence. But the suitableness of the objective in Christian miracles to the subjective in human nature, places them within the circle of *credibility*, and explains how it comes to pass that they *are believed*. This category of proofs in support of a divine revelation is shown to be admissible. Whether the gospel miracles fall within the category must be determined by other considerations. The famous “balance of probabilities,” therefore, by which Mr. Hume and some of his disciples seek to overthrow the possibility of a miraculous attestation, however pretty and complete as a syllogism, is extremely in-

different philosophy. Its basis is speculation rather than induction. It is a theory irrespective of facts, not arising out of them. It can only be accepted on the supposition that mankind in general in forming their beliefs have systematically run counter to the inherent tendencies of their nature—or else that the Creator has endowed us with one aptitude which it is the business of experience to annihilate. Either of these assumptions may be boldly adopted with a view to a foregone purpose—but they who adopt either of them forfeit all claim to an exclusive or superior intellectual philosophy. The whole mistake has originated in, and is perpetuated by, a confused notion that reason and reasoning are the same thing—that the mind sees no truth but by means of the logical faculty—and that all the great interests of life are suspended upon complex processes of argumentative computation. Such, happily, is not the case—the basis of our knowledge is more broadly laid in our constitution—and men will be found, on inquiry, not to err so much in the principles on which they reason, as in the negligent application of those principles to cases as they arise. Their instincts are true enough. To substitute the understanding for them—

“Is’t not as if this mouth should tear this hand,  
For lifting food to it?”

Let our experience have its proper place, and its due honour—it is worthy of both—but its proper place is that of service, not of rule. The soul of man has capacities before it has experience, and the external world primarily addresses them, not it. The voices from without may need an interpreter—but their meaning is for a higher than an interpreter—for the soul itself. Man, readily, may we not say, spontaneously, believes in the supernatural—it is the proper office of experience to guide that belief, and teach it, as it does other instincts, to discriminate between the spurious and the real. Reasoning may say to a man that he *cannot* believe in miracles—reason will say no such thing, for belief in miracles is but an aspect of itself. No intellectual objection, then, so far as yet appears, can justly estop a supernatural attestation of revealed truth.



No good cause can be shown why the witnesses, if answering to their own profession, should not be produced in court. Their testimony is needed, and pertinent to the issue—their mode of utterance is intelligible and decisive. They are such that God may well and consistently have employed them for his purpose in Christianity, and that man may rationally, on fair evidence, believe them. There remains, therefore, now, only one other department of the question requiring consideration in this place. Are the miracles said to have been wrought by Jesus Christ in harmony with the assumed purpose of his mission? He came to shadow forth to our religious nature the unseen God. Are his supernatural works in moral keeping with what we know, from other sources, of the Divine character? On this head, we shall venture two or three observations, and then summarily state what appears to us to be the net result of the whole on the controversy in hand.

§ 17. MIRACLES OF CHRISTIANITY ACCORDANT WITH ITS PURPOSE,  
IN MANNER AND KIND.

Assuming, as we think we are by this time fairly entitled to do, that miracles constitute a necessary and becoming feature of any manifestation of God to us through our own nature, we submit that those recorded as having been wrought by Jesus Christ are worthy of his character and purpose. In more respects than one, their air is that of divinity. If true, they satisfy not only our understanding, but our moral taste—and that they *are* true, the evidence offered is of the most substantial kind that human testimony could produce.

In the *manner* of our Lord's miracles there is a peculiarity which can hardly fail of having struck every candid and reflective mind. We know not that we can better indicate our meaning than by the homely expression—absence of fussiness. Their air is like that of the great works of God—sublimely quiet. We speak now, not so much of the tone of the narratives, as of the characteristics of the performances themselves therein recorded. The supernaturalism of the gospels is not a noisy, clattering, egotistic thing. It is calm as the falling of the dew, noiseless as the rising of the sun, modest and self-subdued as the starry



heavens at midnight. There is a silence in it that awes, and a gentleness that startles, the soul. It fulfils its mission without preparation, or pomp, or parade. There is no bustle—no creaking of machinery—no well got-up theatrical surprises. The trumpet is never blown to call the world to witness it. The occasion usually turns up in the most incidental way. The deed is done without any preluding flourishes meant to direct attention to the marvellousness of its character—and, if ever subsequently alluded to, is alluded to with a view to point a moral, or to enforce an admonition, not to sustain or exaggerate the wonder it produced. One sees nothing in the bearing of the worker of these miracles which seems to say of himself, “Well done!”—no traces of the lingering of his thoughts upon the feat—no peepings forth of self-satisfaction, as though it had been possible for him to have failed. Much as there is of the supernatural in Christ’s life, and unequivocal as it is, one cannot but feel surprised, if that which is recorded be true, that there was so little of it, and that little so retiring in its character. The power which is displayed speaks significantly of the power which was suffered to lie latent. After all, and in exquisite harmony with the entire purport of Christianity, the Omnipotent is veiled. His presence is sufficiently signalized for the moral purpose it was needed to effect, but not further. He shows himself distinctly enough to be apprehended, and yet but sparingly, as if to prevent the spiritual from being overshadowed by the physical. Granted the possession of miraculous powers by man, and this parsimonious display of them accords better with the Divine character, than with human anticipations.

“Could great men thunder  
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne’er be quiet;  
But every pelting, petty officer  
Would use his heaven for thunder; nothing but thunder.”

In the demeanour of Christ we have precisely the reverse. The kind of supernaturalism displayed makes no appeal to the imagination—the measure of the display goes not a step beyond the need. Who does not feel tempted, with such materials, to draw a very different picture? “Nothing but thunder,” would

most likely be our practical rule in the use of supernaturalism. It would have best suited our predilections, where miracles were to be had, to have had nothing but miracles—astounding miracles—miracles that should have made the world bow down awe-rapt, and overpowered. The modest, unobtrusive, calm, and self-possessed supernaturalism of the life of Christ, admirably as it consists with the every-day manifestations to us of the Supreme, is anything but what we might have expected, if man's fancy or fanaticism had sketched and coloured the representation. And this view of the subject ought specially to be noted by those who ascribe the miraculous in Christ's memoirs to the after-touches of admiring and adoring followers. Pious passion does not paint in this severely sober style. The fervour which would infuse supernaturalism where there was none would have infused more of it, and of a more ostentatious sort. Heated imaginations could never have been satisfied with anything, in the way of miracle, short of grotesque forms, and fiery tints. This is no mere conjecture of ours to make out a case—it is substantiated by facts. The second century produced a swarm of pseudo-histories of Jesus Christ, in which fervid zeal exhausts all its inventiveness in wonderful stories designed to fill up the chasms in his life left by the evangelic narratives. Place the two side by side for comparison, and the contrast between them is too great to escape even cursory observation. In the former you have a supernaturalism characterised by almost every form of human imperfection—extravagance, absurdity, ostentation, want of moral purpose, and, occasionally, infirmity of temper. Whereas in the gospel records the miraculous is so toned down as to constitute only a back-ground to the religious, and the moral emotions are more powerfully addressed than the sense of wonder. Miracles, when the products of enthusiasm, are so saturated with the supernatural element as to exclude every other, and the reader who gives credit to them will rise from the perusal of them excited and bewildered by innumerable marvels, but utterly unconscious of their high purpose. The contrast is suggestive. It presents us with a specimen of what man's fancy will do with the miraculous, when stimulated by religious excitement, and unre-

strained by a felt obligation of adhering closely to fact—what a jumble of contrarieties and extravagances it will produce—and it intimates very distinctly that the simplicity and modesty which mark the gospel narratives, could only have been preserved from embellishments which would have assimilated them in tone to the pseudo-histories, by a scrupulous vigilance over their integrity by the Church. If pious imagination had been able to “round them off” at any time during the second century, we may be certain that they would have exhibited some traces of the predominant excitement of the age. They would not have been left to us pervaded as now by an air of calm composure. Their Doric severity would have been set off with some touches of the composite order. This we think is a legitimate inference. But whether it be accepted for such, or not, it must be conceded, that the general character of the supernaturalism running through the New Testament life of Jesus Christ, is not unworthy of his professed purpose—and that the port, style, and address of these assumed witnesses for God, so far from belying their pretensions, tend rather to secure for them a candid and favourable attention.

There is another characteristic of Christ’s miracles worthy of note. There is a striking correspondence between them and the professed object of his career, in respect of *what* they were, as well as of *how* they were performed. Not only in manner, but in kind, are they becoming representatives of God. They have a moral aspect entirely in accordance with the tenour of the revelation of which they are assumed to be the seal. They exemplify very impressively the gentleness and benignity of Divine power. They all of them teach God’s sympathy with the suffering, God’s care for the wretched, God’s pity for the outcast. Throughout the life of Christ, wherever supernatural power is brought to bear upon man, it is invariably in tenderness. The leper, the lunatic, the maniac, the paralysed, the deaf and dumb, the blind, the dying, and the dead—such are the subjects selected on whom to display the all-conquering energy of God. When we descend to particulars, there are usually to be found associated with each case circumstances which set off the benignity expressed by



the miracle; so that on the whole the feature of it which addresses our affections is, if anything, more prominent than that which awakens our astonishment. The bulk of that which is recorded of what Jesus Christ *did* during his public ministry, consists of supposed manifestations of Almighty power—and his use of that power, therefore, must have contributed very mainly to our general estimate of his character. Now what is that estimate, we ask? What has it uniformly been? Has it not been such, in all subsequent times, as to commend him to man's heart as the most touching impersonation of compassionate benevolence which the world has ever witnessed? Put the two ideas together—unbounded power, and unparalleled gentleness—a hand that can do anything, at the service of a heart that can feel nothing but disinterested kindness. Is not such an association worthy of God? But is it not also unique and novel as compared with man's ordinary conceptions of what supernaturalism would be likely to perform? We will not go the length of affirming that man's imagination, excited by religious ideas, could not have hit upon this combination of might and tenderness—but we submit with confidence that the seemly and significant alliance was not likely to have suggested itself to a *Jewish* fancy. The theory of Strauss, that the miracles of Jesus are to be regarded as ultimate deposits of the mythic tendencies of the age—a theory which has been treated with more gravity than its claim to be considered rational in any way deserves—may be looked at, for a moment, in the light of the characteristic we have just now pointed out. Conscious how brief an interval some thirty or forty years must be regarded, in which for a popular excitement, or predisposition, to be originated, diffused, volatilized, condensed, and finally circulated in the shape of historic facts, without involving deliberate imposture, Strauss derives the Jewish idea of a Messiah from Old Testament history and prophecy. What he should be, is the argument, had been settled in popular anticipation, for many preceding generations. For some hundreds of years the national mind had been slowly absorbing into it and becoming saturated with, a certain Messianic notion—and the ideas concerning the expected Messiah were in a state of



solution at the time of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. Those ideas had been gained from an exclusive and overweening study of the Old Testament, and especially of the prophets. As soon, therefore, as the personage had appeared, and passed off the stage, with whom these ideas were believed to be identified, Jewish notions of what the Messiah *was to be*, rapidly crystallized around the few facts of our Lord's historic life, and, without intentional deception on the part of any one, arranged themselves into the New Testament account of what *he is*—and hence, a sort of spontaneous and involuntary expression, in mythical forms, of something which was held in excess by the Jewish mind, came very early to be regarded as veritable history. Now the worth of this very ingenious theory may be settled by a single question—Does the supposed mythical crystallization, as we have it in the life of Christ, correspond with the Messianic ideas previously held in solution by the Jewish people? Would minds full of Old Testament notions, or rather, of notions derived from a perverted interpretation of Old Testament history and prophecy, have ultimately deposited a mythical form resembling in any one of its aspects the life of Christ? Is it not strange that the unstudied outcome should be in marked contrast to all that we know to have been within? Why, it is notorious that the Jews, reading their prophets by the interpretative light kindled by their own national pride, expected a Messiah the very opposite in all respects to the one described in the gospel narratives. They looked for a prince, and a conqueror, armed with Divine power to smite, overthrow, and subjugate their foes. If their preconceptions had taken mythic form, and Old Testament ideas filtering through the national mind had merely become concrete in the New—if this alleged miracle is but a reproduction of one performed by Elisha, and that, of one performed on Elijah—how comes it that *Moses* is consigned to such marked neglect, more especially as the tone of his supernatural works harmonized so completely with Jewish conceptions of what would be the Messiah's object? Why have we not fire from heaven to consume opponents, or plagues to worry them, or, at least, legions of angels to terrify

them? Can any one really believe that national religious sentiment in the country and age of Jesus Christ, was such as, if left to express itself concerning the Messiah that was to come, would associate miraculous power exclusively with gentleness, and employ it in acts of goodness towards the ecclesiastically despised, and outcast, and banned? The theory, like that of Mr. Hume, is not an induction of facts, but a conjecture in defiance of them—and it is a conjecture which not only fails to establish itself, but in its failure goes some way towards the confirmation of that which it is designed to supplant. It proceeds upon the assumption that the miracles of Christ were not the forgeries of designing impostors. It clears a space for itself by showing that any naturalistic interpretation of them, once so fashionable in Germany, and still adopted by some sceptics in this country, is manifestly untenable, and absurd. It admits, by implication, that the Jesus Christ of history so corresponds with the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, that the first is but a mythical deposit of the last. The entire argument shows that the Jews *might* have borrowed the Messiah of the New Testament from the hints of him furnished to them by the Old—and, having done this service, it disappears before the palpable fact, that although the Christ of the gospels might have been put together by Jewish minds from the intimations of prophecy, had Jewish minds expected such a Christ, it is yet undeniable that they *did not* so interpret their prophets, that they cherished no anticipations of him in accordance with the evangelic records, and that if the supernatural features of those narratives are mythical concretions, they have hardened into shapes wholly unlike what Jewish national ideas of the Messiah would spontaneously have taken.

Nor is this all. The display of omnipotence in exclusive association with compassionate benevolence, brought under our notice by the miracles of Jesus Christ, was as novel an exhibition for the world in general, as it was foreign to Jewish preconceptions. History furnishes no other instance of a reputed revelation of God having been thus authenticated. In all other hands but those of the writers of the gospel memoirs of Christ, the supernatural has taken some other shape than that of relief to the suffering. Its prevailing tone

has been less human. Its expressions have been less genial and kindly. Its teachings have had far less to do with the tender sympathies of our common nature. In the life of Jesus it puts on a social, almost a domestic, aspect—and its entire moral influence allures, rather than terrifies. Now this, we hesitate not to say, was a version of miraculous power quite unexpected to the general run of human thoughts on this subject. Nowhere else do we encounter it in this special guise. This *may* be a coincidence—but it certainly looks like a pre-ordination. It strangely tallies with Christ's avowed object—a manifestation to the world of God's *love* to men. And this obvious correspondence lends additional probability to the assumption that the New Testament miracles were witnesses for God to the reality of our Lord's mission. If supernaturalism was to be employed at all on this errand, it could not have been put in a more suitable form. It is worthy alike of the Being represented, and of the purpose which the distinct attestation of that Being was meant to justify.

§ 18. CHRISTIAN MIRACLES SUSTAINED BY EVIDENCE—THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

We now proceed to the last position we deem it necessary to make good. We affirm that the kind and amount of evidence offered in support of the miracles of Christianity suffice to meet the demands of reason, inasmuch as we are involved in many more, and much greater, difficulties by the rejection, than by the admission, of the proof tendered to us. And this is the highest kind of moral demonstration that the subject will admit of.

To prevent confusion, we select a single miracle for the illustration of this point—to prevent cavil, we select that miracle, which, if true, is the most decisive testimony of God to all the claims of Jesus Christ, and which, if untrue, may be most easily and triumphantly exposed. We take the alleged resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and shall endeavour to point out in regard to it, the principal features of the evidence by which it is sustained, and their sufficiency to satisfy all intellectual demands.

There can be no reasonable difference of opinion, we pre-



sume, as to the logical effect of this miracle, if fairly established. We have already seen that if it became the Supreme to show himself to the hearts of men through the medium of a human life, the nature of the case would require that life to be distinctly marked off from human life generally, as one consecrated for the supposed manifestation by God himself. We have also seen that this could only be effected by the infusion into it of a supernatural element in connexion with either knowledge, or power, or both. We have now to remark that no exertion of miraculous power *by* Christ, and during his life, could have evinced God's sanction of his whole purpose so completely and satisfactorily, as the exertion of miraculous power *upon* him, and after his death. His career had then been run out—and a divine seal put upon it then, was put upon it as an entirety. Moreover, it included the death of Christ as part of the representative process designed to shadow forth to men the benign purpose and the benevolent propensions of the Unseen God. And, lastly, it was a direct act of the Almighty power, without the intervention of any other agency, the last sequent being next to the first antecedent—the revival of Jesus following next in order to the will of God, thus connecting the one with the other as closely as possible. “He that believeth on me,” said our Lord, “believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me, seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” “I and my Father are one.” These are high pretensions to be calmly and deliberately put forth by man. How may they be justified? He who uttered these sayings, and who thus asserted to the world the representative character of his person and his life, sleeps the last sleep of mortality, having declared that he should rise again on the third day. The proof of his mission is now left exclusively with God himself. If he spake without warrant, it will soon be seen in the natural decay of his lifeless remains. If he was commissioned thus to announce himself, the fact may be fully



authenticated to rational belief in all ages. Resurrection from death implies the direct intervention of God—and a resurrection which was appealed to before death as the crowning proof of divine authorization, exhibits, as plainly as any attestation can do, the signature and seal of the approving Deity. We need not enlarge on this head—for the common sense of mankind will recognise on a life, of which the often avowed object is to reflect the image of the Invisible, and which is thus given back after death by a direct exertion of the divine energy, the unmistakeable stamp of heaven.

That Jesus Christ was put to death on the cross as a public malefactor, is a historic fact resting upon precisely the same kind of evidence as that Socrates was put to death by a draught of hemlock. The same reasons which justify our belief in the last, justify also our belief in the first. True, some have conjectured that crucifixion, in the case of Jesus, did not terminate in his death, but produced merely a temporary suspension of the vital functions—that the cold of the sepulchre revived him, and that the medical skill of his supposed friends among the Essenes so far restored him as to enable him to appear to Mary in the garden on the morning of the third day. We shall not stay to examine this modern fabrication, which Strauss has effectually demolished. The genius which could piece on this clumsy fraud to the life of Jesus Christ must have been utterly blind to its moral beauty. Either the entire history must be rejected as an imposture, or this conjecture must be dismissed as an unworthy attempt on our credulity. But we are bound to protest against the too common practice, never recognised as legitimate but in connexion with this subject, of setting up the guesses of modern scepticism against the fairly authenticated statements of ancient history. And we may remark further, that the invention, even if accepted as a substitute for the record, does not lead us out of difficulty. If Jesus had thus recovered—if it can be imagined possible that a man whose life and doctrine were of such an unquestionably elevated religious tenour should stoop to so mean an artifice as to delude his sorrowing disciples, and could contentedly see them go forth to brave privation, persecution, and death, in the

promulgation of his own falsehood—it yet remains to be settled how, during the remainder of his supposed stay on earth, he could contrive to elude discovery either by friend or foe—and how, since he must have had several accomplices, the truth never leaked out, either then, or afterwards, although mighty interests were suspended upon it. Whatever reason, then, may hereafter appear for doubting the fact of the resurrection, any doubt as to the fact of death is not only unsustained by evidence, but is in the teeth of it.

And now, touching the alleged resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we propose to look at the kind of evidence adduced in confirmation of the statement. That his immediate followers did, very soon after his decease, assert, in the most open and explicit manner, the fact of his resurrection, is as certain as anything past can be. Supposing the gospel narratives of that event to have undergone a process of “rounding off” in subsequent times—a purely gratuitous supposition—it will scarcely be pretended by any who have the smallest reputation for historical criticism to maintain, that belief in the event itself originated at a later period than the date at which the earliest of these documents was written. The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the first general epistle of Peter, the genuineness of which it were a hopeless attempt to dispute, and which were unquestionably written before the death of Nero, not merely assert the resurrection of Christ, but are addressed, the one to a society, and the other to scattered individuals, whose distinctive religious tenets were based upon a recognition of this fact. Now setting aside altogether the testimony of the evangelists—for no other good reason, however, than to show the strength of the evidence—we gather from epistolary correspondence, extant during the lifetime of these apostles, that the resurrection of Christ had been publicly preached even then long enough to constitute the basis of several churches in various parts of the world, some of which churches had already become numerous. The very existence of these communities at that period, carries us back several years, and places us within a hand’s-breadth, as it were, of the time at which the earthly career of Jesus was said to have termi-

nated. Do what we will with the gospels, it cannot be disputed that the companions and immediate followers of Jesus had, before the lapse of many years after his death, engraven in indelible lines upon the surface of society their own belief that their Lord had risen. It is quite certain, therefore, that they were the authors of this report, and that whether the gospels were or were not written by eye-witnesses, we are indebted to eye-witnesses, and not to traditionary exaggerations, for the declaration that Christ rose from the dead. Rub off, then, if you will, every incident relating to that fact which you may choose to consider an embellishment of later times, you do not disturb in the least the evidence which has come down to us, that *the fact itself* was affirmed by the apostles of Jesus, and that its truth rests directly on their explicit testimony. In a word, the witnesses upon whose authority we rely in this case, were men who enjoyed the opportunity of founding their own belief, not on hearsay, but on the evidence of their own senses. Strauss himself admits this. After having criticised away the entire story of Christ's resurrection, as recorded by the evangelists, he admits that the apostles entertained a firm belief in the miracle which his philosophy denies—and, indeed, it is difficult to conceive how Christianity originated, or in what manner its rapid and extensive spread could have been effected, except on the hypothesis that a belief in the fact of Christ's resurrection had taken a firm hold upon the minds of his apostles.

It is to be further considered that, in relation to this alleged fact, we have to do with the belief, not of one individual, but of *several*. No hypercritical dispute about the authorship of the several gospels can get rid of this element of the case. The apostle Paul may be set down as an enthusiast, but he will hardly be accounted dishonest, even by the most inveterate scepticism. His own vision of his Lord may be regarded as a mere illusion of an over-wrought brain, but when he sums up the proof of Christ's resurrection to the Corinthian church, he surely states facts of which he had full cognizance. He declares, without any doubt, or circumlocution, that Christ was seen after his resurrection by above five hundred brethren at



once, most of whom, he avers, were still alive at the time of his writing. Such a statement, in such terms, and from such a man, implies that he is deposing to what he is consciously able to verify. He mentions also that the risen Lord was seen of Peter, of James, and of all the apostles. So direct an assertion would never have been made by one who had so good an opportunity of making himself acquainted with the facts of the case, during his fifteen days' residence with Peter, but upon authority deemed by him to be perfectly trustworthy. But this is not all. Peter's written testimony to the fact of Christ's resurrection we have in his own undisputed epistle. John's belief in it, even if it were true that he did not write the gospel which has been uniformly ascribed to him, pervades his first epistle. The letter of James, and also that of Jude, imply their faith. We have the testimony of James, the brother of Jesus, in his martyrdom by Herod. The labours of the other apostles sufficiently attest their unwavering belief in the fundamental fact of Christianity. So that although we have not in our hands the actual depositions of all these witnesses, we have proof enough that they believed that Christ had risen from the dead.

And they were sincere believers. Their lives prove this. Men who took the course which they pursued consistently till death, must have been thoroughly convinced of the truth of what they affirmed. Whatever may have been the case with others, it is clear that in *their* minds there was not the shadow of a misgiving. They never halt nor hesitate. Fiery trials do not drive them back upon any reconsideration of the grounds of their faith. In all their proclamations of the fact, they speak of it as undoubted. Before friend and foe they are alike confident. Not a single recorded expression of any one of them indicates that they saw any possibility of their having been mistaken. Through many long years, and under the pressure of various persecutions, they hold fast to the same testimony, which some of them cheerfully seal with their blood. Now, on the hypothesis that Christ did *not* rise, their agreement, strength, and persistency of belief, are, to say the least of it, extraordinary. His death staggered all their previous notions of the Messianic reign. A fancy that he had appeared to them after death



would scarcely have sufficed so to change the views, hopes, desires, and determinations of all of them, as to set them at once upon a totally different track, and keep them on it, in spite of all that they had to encounter therein, up to the very hour of their departure. Terrible vicissitudes when brought upon us by an illusion tend to compel a review of the circumstances under which it was originally embraced—and if here and there a nature is to be found which clings with a tighter tenacity to the hallucination which leads it into trouble, it is not reasonable to suppose that a dozen individuals, duped by their own imagination, and exposed, in consequence of their easy credulity, to an after lifetime of difficulties, hazards, privations, and sufferings, would every one of them maintain his first faith without further question. Nor was this an instance in which further question might not have led at once to the resolution of all doubts. In the case of other miracles, the apostles looking back upon them after a period long enough to sober down their excitement, might have felt it impossible to institute a rigid re-examination, for the subjects of those miracles may have been lost sight of—removed far away, or dead. But in regard to the resurrection, supposing their belief in it to have been hastily, although honestly formed, but really at variance with fact, they must have known that it was easy enough to set themselves right. The *dead body* of Jesus, in such case, must have remained in the possession of either his enemies or his friends. If it had been in the hands of his enemies, it is certain that it would have been produced to crush at once the pestilent heresy which undermined the authority and influence of the Jewish hierarchy. If it had been preserved by his friends, surely it would have been accessible to them. Strange that no one of them ever appears to have thought of this decisive test of the reality of their dreams or visions! Marvellous that no one of the twelve should have suggested that it were prudent, before committing themselves to a deadly contest with the ecclesiastical authorities at Jerusalem, by asserting the resurrection of Jesus, to ascertain that his corpse was not where they had laid it, nor elsewhere within the possible search of keen-eyed opponents!

Now let the reader attempt to estimate the number of improbabilities he must accept, on the hypothesis that the resurrection of Christ did not occur. Of course, if this miracle were not wrought on the lifeless body of Christ, neither were any miracles really wrought by him during his public ministry—for the intellectual objection to the resurrection, if valid at all, is valid against all miracles as such. The historical result left us, after extracting all supernaturalism from the life of Jesus, may be thus summed up. A Jew, endowed with great spiritual insight, appears amongst his countrymen, and assumes to be the long-expected Messiah. He succeeds in imbuing the minds of some few poor persons with faith in his pretensions, and after attaching them to his person, and evidently exciting in their minds, whether purposely or involuntarily, the most splendid expectations of the kingdom which he is about to restore, he manages to provoke the deadly hostility of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and is executed on the cross for blasphemy. Now what was there in the career of such a man which should predispose his few faithful disciples to anticipate that he would rise again from the dead? Certainly not his previous works of Divine power, for the hypothesis sets them all aside, as either frauds effected by Christ himself, or as myths which assumed shape only after his decease. If they were frauds—but we need not follow out this alternative. The character of Christ is felt to be so utterly incompatible with the possibility of his having stooped to deliberate and reiterated deception with a view to compass his sublimely spiritual ends, that the most inveterate scepticism rejects the notion that he could have done so, and prefers the theory of myths, as far more consonant with reason. But if the records we have of the mighty works of Jesus of Nazareth were the concretions of ideas prevalent among the Jewish people at that age, and were not originated until some time after his death, of course they could not have misled his disciples into foolish and vain anticipations that their Master would be restored to them even from the jaws of the sepulchre. Did he, then, during his lifetime, venture any intelligible prediction that he would rise again? Strauss proves by his omnipotent criticism, as satisfactorily as

criticism of the kind *can prove anything*, that he did not. Well then, we have a dozen poor, uneducated, uninfluential Jews, or rather Galileans, wrought into high expectations of what was to be the destiny of their Messianic Lord, suddenly hurled into despondency by his ignominious death. The subsequent facts of the case compel us to suppose that something occurred to them which they one and all interpreted into the resuscitation of his lifeless body, although that body must have remained in their possession, or, at least, within their reach. And this illusion, which might have been so readily dispelled by a visit to the tomb—unless, indeed, we suppose that for a reason not to be divined, artifice was resorted to for concealing the body, for all future time—this illusion takes so deep a hold upon their hearts, that they forget all their previous ideas of what the reign of Christ was to be, and of what it was to do for them, and they refine them into a system of spiritual verities, which forthwith they promulgate as founded on the resurrection of Jesus, and as deriving their fulness of meaning from that fact. The very tone of the men's minds alters—and having unitedly surrendered their faith to a fiction of their own fancy, they dismiss all dreams of earthly greatness, and give themselves up to the pursuit and diffusion of the most spiritual representations of God, and the soul, and eternity, of which the world knows anything. And these men, having thus marvellously concurred in crediting a fancy of their own which they could have dispelled at any moment, and having made that fancy the basis of a highly spiritual system of religion, continue till death in the zealous proclamation of what they had thus spun out of their own mistake, gladly bearing all persecution, privation, and insult, never once faltering in their heroic course, and, in the end, founding that Christianity which has come down to us as by far the most striking moral phenomenon in the history of mankind. Why surely, they who are driven into such desperate straits as to be obliged to put up with this tissue of improbabilities, or to accept even worse, as an explanation of the origin of the Christian faith, cannot have gained anything in the way of satisfaction to their *reason* by rejecting the fact to which the apostles testified.



It cannot be pretended that the difficulty is less to him who denies, than to him who accepts, the alleged miracle, and certainly, the evidence in support of it is far more various and consistent than that on which its repudiation proceeds. If, indeed, it were true that a miracle were unnecessary to any spiritual revelation of the Supreme, or, being necessary, were in direct opposition to the principles of the Divine government, we could not, under any circumstances, acquiesce in the truth of the apostolic testimony to the fact of Christ's resurrection—but even then, we should be forced to conclude that in the conduct of his government of man, God had permitted a mysterious concurrence of events which had made it as difficult to human reason, and, indeed more so, to disbelieve a fiction dishonouring to his own character, than to accept it, and draw legitimate, but false, inferences respecting that character from it.

Not only, however, are the witnesses to this fact contemporaries of Christ, and professedly eye-witnesses—not only have we the testimony of several of them to their own assured belief—not only is their character for integrity unimpeachable—not only do surrounding circumstances militate strongly against all suspicion that they could have been imposed upon by their own excited imagination—but the fact itself was one which scarcely admitted of the possibility of mistake. It is quite beside the mark to pretend, as a recent critic has done, that modern belief in the phenomenon of *clairvoyance* is parallel to the belief of the apostles in the fact of the resurrection. A man of intelligence and honesty may witness the feats of *clairvoyance*, and believe in the reality of the power of second sight under given circumstances, without laying us under any obligation to accept his conclusion. Reason, indeed, bids us receive his deposition as to the facts he has witnessed, but not necessarily as to the inference he draws from those facts. What he saw, and what he heard, we are justified in taking on his testimony—but the theory on which he interprets what he saw and heard we are not bound to admit. Now in the case of the resurrection the witnesses do not give evidence in support of an inference, but merely of a fact. They might not be competent to prove to us that the resurrection of Jesus was effected.



by the immediate power of God, but they were surely competent to judge whether it was or was not a resurrection. Their organs of sight, hearing, and touch, might be relied on, even if their judgment were at fault. The matter in relation to which their evidence is adduced was one to be resolved, not by the understanding, but by the senses. We believe that evidence, just as we should believe the assertions of a trustworthy man as to things which he had seen done in the name of *clairvoyance*. We simply substitute their bodily organs for our own. If we reject their testimony, we can only reject it on the ground that their *report* is untrue—that their character for honesty is not reliable. No very nice discrimination is required to distinguish between a corpse and a living man. A band of witnesses who assure us that they have seen, heard, conversed with, and touched, a fellow-man, and found him to be living, cannot reasonably be objected to on the ground that they might have been mistaken. Now take the several accounts of the resurrection of Christ furnished by the gospels, which we have hitherto excluded from consideration, but to the authenticity of which the only objection urged which does not cut up all ancient history by the roots, is the element of supernaturalism which pervades them, and let common sense judge whether, if the facts anything resembled what is set down in the record, there was room left for any delusion of the senses. We must reverse all our established methods of estimating the value of human testimony, before we can get at the conclusion that the broad fact here deposed to is a fiction. The man would be laughed to scorn who should venture to set aside evidence thus cogent in support of any admitted historical fact—such, for instance, as the assassination of Julius Cæsar in the Capitol. Upon a basis of proof far less solid than this we accept all that we know of ancient history. If our preceding observations are well founded, and there exists no intellectual reason for repudiating, *as such*, a miraculous attestation of revealed truth, then we are warranted in drawing the conclusion that the kind and amount of evidence on which we build all our knowledge of the past, is amply sufficient to sustain our belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Regarding the objection to the miraculous element in this case

as having been more than neutralized by our foregoing strain of observation, we remark that this fundamental fact of Christianity is supported by a body of evidence, more solid, compact, and extensive, than can be found at the base of any ancient historic statement whatever. Reason, consequently, must do more violence to itself by rejecting, than by admitting it.

§ 19. SUMMARY OF THE PRECEDING OBSERVATIONS.

The evidence in support of the crowning miracle of Christianity having been shown to be amply sufficient for the demands of reason, it will be quite unnecessary to proceed further with this part of our subject. The resurrection of Jesus Christ distinctly marks off his life from human life in general, as being what he declared it to be—a manifestation of God to man with a view to engage religious faith and obedience. This point being established, further objections to the supernaturalism of the life of Jesus are idle. The greater miracle carries with it the less—and assuredly if no valid argument can be found to set aside the former, there remains no firm position from which to direct an attack against the latter. We are, therefore, justified in summing up the foregoing observations, and in bringing this part of our subject to a close. The following are the propositions which appear to us to have been made good.

1. Whatever reason we have in the constitution of human nature to expect a display of God to our moral emotions through a moral medium, we have also for expecting that supernaturalism will constitute a prominent feature in that display—inasmuch as there is no other conceivable method by which it can be rendered either complete or authentic.

2. A manifestation of Almighty power in attestation of a Divine mission such as that assumed by Christ to have been entrusted to him, is not only appropriate and pertinent to the emergency which requires it, but answers besides several purposes in connexion with it, of high moral importance.

3. A supernatural seal to a human-life revelation of the Creator, so far from being any departure from the principles of his established government, whether physical or moral, is in entire harmony with them, and subserves the highest end of

man's existence—that end for which he has been constituted what he is, and which gives significance to all the conditions by which he is surrounded.

4. Miracles in support of revealed truth may be, and are, reasonably believed, because when wrought for the attainment of a worthy spiritual purpose, they are congruous with those natural and moral instincts of humanity which appear to have no suitable external object but in them.

5. The miracles of Christianity are, both in manner and in kind, in striking unison with its avowed design—and the general cast of them renders it in the last degree unlikely that the accounts of them handed down to us in the New Testament, grew out of a gradual process of embellishment by early disciples, or are mythical concretions of the prevailing Messianic notions of the age in which they are said to have been wrought.

6. The testimony on which the greatest of Christian miracles—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead—reposes, is as solid and satisfactory as evidence based on human testimony can well be—and can only be rejected by a palpable disregard of all the laws by which we test the trustworthiness of ancient history.

#### § 20. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.

If the foregoing propositions have been well sustained, the current intellectual objections to the supernaturalism of the gospels are untenable—and the sceptics of the present day have gained no material advance upon their predecessors, at least in philosophic position. The arguments of that class of apologists for Christianity, in which the first place in the order of time may be assigned to Tertullian, and in logical precision and force to Dr. Paley, have not yet been bowed out of court. They have not been neutralized. They are by no means obsolete. The conclusiveness once believed to attach to them, attaches to them still. The clouds of dust which have been raised about them may have concealed them for awhile, but leaves them, nevertheless, just where they were. The wind which blows away those clouds, although it adds nothing to the

strength of previously existing proof, restores it to visibility. And this is the service it has been our special aim to perform for the Christian faith. It has been our endeavour to show that it accords with the highest philosophy—and that as a mode of revelation, supernaturally authenticated, it is recommended to our belief by facts and principles admitted in common by its advocates and opponents. The deepest truths on which it rests are those which human reason has long since recognised as solid and unchangeable. We have now but one further duty to perform. The manifestation of God to our religious nature by means of a human person and history miraculously attested, unobjectionable in theory, may yet be indefensible in fact. As a possibility it may be admitted. As an actuality it may be denied. A goodly purpose, some may be disposed to concede, but where is the embodiment of it? Is it in the New Testament—a history which falls to pieces under the action of philosophic criticism? The answer to this inquiry will constitute the last part of the present volume. And so we pass on to a consideration of **THE RECORD**.



## PART IV.

### THE RECORD.

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## THE RECORD.

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### § 1. THE BIBLE A RECORD OF A REVELATION.

HITHERTO we have conducted our argument with an exclusive reference to the person and life of Jesus Christ, and have, throughout, considered him as *the* revelation of God to man. Such we take to be the fairest as well as the most convenient method of proceeding—the fairest, because in estimating the worth of any pretensions, we are bound to look at them in the light of their own explanations and conditions—the most convenient, because the core of the question having been disposed of, all that is extraneous or accidental to it will fall into its proper place. Christ is the key-stone of that arch of spiritual knowledge a copy of which we have in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Remove him from the system, and the whole falls to pieces. Give him that place in it which he claimed for himself, and then each part has a special relation to him, derives its significance from him, and helps to constitute a symmetrical whole of which he is the centre. “I am the way, the truth, and the life—no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” This is the position in the economy of spiritual life and government which, on his own representation, he assumed to fill—and all that he said and did must, in reason, be judged of in its relation to that position. And it is on this ground, and on this only, that the main controversy between believers and unbelievers must be decided. Christ’s life is to us the medium through which God has morally displayed himself to our religious nature, or it is nothing—say rather, it is a pretence which has no basis of reality to rest

upon. In the firmament of divine revelation he is the Sun—and towards him all things pertaining to the system gravitate. Hence, the singleness of our line of argument—for if we have failed here, we have failed altogether—if we have succeeded here, we have succeeded in gaining the key to the central meaning of revealed truth.

But although in justice to the argument, and for the more convenient conduct of it, we have thus isolated the life of Jesus Christ, it is not to be regarded as so isolated in reality. It is represented in the Bible as connected with a long foregoing train of providential facts, and with a subsequent brief passage of apostolic history, which, taken together with itself, make up, as it were, the body of humanity in which the Unseen has rendered himself visible. That Christ is the head of that body, and that in him centre all its threads of vitality, does not militate against the conclusion that the trunk and limbs have a necessary part to perform, and that severed from them, even he would not be, viewed in its practical effect upon our minds, a perfect manifestation of the Deity. Just as in a portrait, we require a background in harmony with the main subject, in order to bring out all its pictorial significance, and look upon it as an essential part of the picture, although it has no meaning nor value but in its relation to the face and figure of the person represented, so that portion of scripture history which does not form part of the life of Jesus Christ, and which, separated from it, is almost valueless, may nevertheless constitute a fitting background to this human-life delineation of the Supreme, necessary to the completeness of the picture, and well adapted to bring out into striking relief its features and expression. Each is subservient to the other, but in a very different manner. The accessories heighten the charm of the principal—the principal gives a meaning to the accessories—but in the final result, even that meaning is reflected back upon the chief object, lending to it an additional beauty. The life of Christ, then, as a manifestation of God, must be taken with its appurtenances—in other words, with those scriptural statements of historic fact which preceded and followed his personal and earthly career. The revelation is through him—



but through him in connexion with a foregoing and subsequent history—and the whole must be viewed as the one picture in which human hearts may best acquaint themselves with the ever-blessed God. This, as we understand, is the guise in which objective Christianity offers itself to our faith—and it is in this guise that its pretensions are ultimately to be tested and determined.

Supposing, then, that no such collection of writings as that which we denominate the Bible, had ever been given to the world, it would yet be true (on the hypothesis that the series of facts therein recorded actually occurred), that to some portion of our race the Creator had shadowed forth his moral character and designs through the medium of humanity. The only real difference between God's manifestation of himself in such a manner, and that which we profess to have in the Scriptures, would be a difference of duration. He who passes before a mirror is as really reflected by it, as he who sits before a photographic apparatus—only in the one case the image vanishes as soon as the man withdraws, in the other the image is retained. The sacred volume is but the photograph of those historic facts in which God has showed himself to mankind. The revelation itself was prior to the volume—the volume serves but to give fixity to forms and colours previously exhibited. We are made acquainted with God morally, by what he has done morally amongst us—and the simple fact, that what he has thus done is written down in a book, cannot alter the essential medium by which we arrive at our acquaintance with him. It will hardly be contended, we imagine, that a person who had learned from the apostle Peter—say Mark, the son of his wife's sister—the main story of the life of Christ, and had listened to Peter's interpretation of its spiritual significance, knew nothing of Christianity until after the publication of the gospels and epistles which now appear in our New Testament. To his mind that publication did not necessarily disclose a single truth with which he was not already familiar—nor add a single touch to the picture in which he recognised the Image of the Invisible. The facts themselves, and a true insight into their meaning, would be all that he required to

put him into full possession of that spiritual knowledge which we profess to derive from THE BOOK. This is so obvious that it appears to verge upon puerility to make the assertion. And yet if this be so, the true function of the book to all succeeding generations of men, is merely to put them into a similar position with regard to these facts and their significance which was occupied by such an one as Mark before a line of the New Testament was written. In other words, the Bible is not a revelation, but a *record* of one.

§ 2. NECESSITY FOR, AND FITNESS OF, SOME SUCH RECORD.

Something has been written, more has been said, and very much has been insinuated, to the detriment of Christianity, as a *book*-revelation. How much profound philosophy there is in the sneer, we shall be able to estimate more accurately as we proceed. If it was fitting—and we have attempted to show that it was—for God to seek a response of our moral emotions, by developing his moral character and purpose by means of a human life—if it be true that thus, and thus only, he could draw so nigh to us as to awaken our spiritual sympathies, and engage our affections—and if it be a fact that we are endowed with a religious nature all the instincts of which crave some such external manifestation of the Supreme, and which, in the absence of the genuine, will invent the spurious—then it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine how the advantage of any such revelation could be secured to the world at large, except by means of a written record. The objection, if it have any force at all, strikes at any special exhibition of the Divine mind and will through the medium of man, and is equivalent to an assertion, that be the felt wants of our being what they may, and however becoming to Infinite intelligence it may be to show himself in the physical laws and phenomena of the universe, it is contrary to all reasonable notions of him that he should be mirrored to our souls by that which is capable of reflecting a much distincter and more impressive image of himself—namely, our own nature. This objection, however, is purely gratuitous, and cannot be sustained. But if God might properly and graciously shadow forth his moral character, relationship, and

purpose, by any such medium, it follows that whatever existing means of perpetuating the benefit of this manifestation might be necessary, would also be proper and gracious. Now, all facts the knowledge of which comes to us from man, or by him, are necessarily circumscribed in time and space. The act, the speech, the suffering, the life of any of our fellows by which God is adumbrated, must have a relation both to locality and duration. The act must have been done, the speech must have been uttered, the suffering must have been endured, the life must have been lived, somewhere, and at some time—and unless a standing miracle had been ordained, must have had a beginning and an end, and a circuit or area within which alone human cognisance of any one of them was possible. The providence of God has so arranged that the sphere of our knowledge should not necessarily be thus limited—and by means of arbitrary symbols fitly put together we are able to multiply indefinitely copies of any fact or sentiment, and thus perpetuate it to all future ages. Against the efficiency or completeness of this arrangement, men may complain as they will. They might just as modestly, just as reasonably, complain that the sun does not rise and set twice instead of once in the twenty-four hours. It is one of the established conditions of our present lot—a condition affecting the mode in which not only our supposed knowledge of God by Christianity is transmitted, but also a great portion of that knowledge of him which is derived from other sources. It is not merely the believer in Christ, as God manifest in the flesh, that is indebted to a written record for the truths which quicken a religious life in his soul. To a very great extent, the advocates of a religion of Nature are under similar restrictions and obligations. The facts in which they see the Invisible are communicated to them for the most part through books. If science is to teach us the Almighty, science must condescend to the same instrumentality which is employed for the dissemination of Christianity. What a vast proportion of the knowledge which we possess of physical laws has come to us in this way! But if this were not the case, does it become reasonable men to value the truths communicated to their minds, not by their intrinsic importance, but by the acci-



dental instrument of their communication? What do we know of *man* but by history? On what ultimate basis do all our moral speculations rest, but upon that of history? How could we have attained to any generalized and philosophical view of our race, their instincts, powers, affections, habits, laws, or destiny, but by means of history? Is there nothing valuable but what is recognised by the senses? And if it be true that there is latent in every man's nature the possibilities of all the ideas which can elevate his soul into communion with the Deity, waiting only the impulse from without to quicken them into life and mature them into actualities, why may not that impulse be imparted, as well by a written fact, as by one seen, or heard, or handled? Positively, we feel ashamed at, and humbled by, any attempt, necessary as it seems, to discuss the objection aimed at Christianity as a revelation of God, on the ground that the facts in which that revelation is embodied, and the exposition of their spiritual significance, are handed down to us in a book.

By reason, the worth of things will be valued according to the aliment they are capable of supplying to itself. What is matter, in whatever form it may appear to man, or what its worth, save as measured by the ideas and emotions it excites? The outspread universe, vast and unbounded as it is to human apprehension, infinitely varied in its aspects, beautiful in its order, complicated in its mechanism, is glorious to our minds only for the glorious ideas which our acquaintance with, and study of it, kindle in the soul. Wherein is a book to be contemned in comparison, if it folds up within itself that which can produce the same elevating and ennobling result, and even in a superior degree? It is little—but littleness is only a relative quality. It is perishable in its individual form—but it is capable of being made, by re-impression, coeval with the globe itself. Aye! and the symbols which are ranged across and adown its pages, formal as they appear to the organ of vision, and devoid of beauty, can yet start into life, within that mysterious microcosm, the soul of man, thoughts of the Unseen as worthy of Him and it, sentiments as pure, reflections as clear and profound, and sensibilities as tender and as deep, as can any



material emblem of spiritual ideas, though on the most Titanic scale. The depths of man's nature are oftener sounded—the hidden springs of those affections which flow directly onward towards the Eternal are oftener touched and laid open—and the broad expanse of reason is oftener bathed in sunlight—by books than by any other means. The divine, in its loftiest sublimity, in its most awful and heart-subduing beauty, gleams in upon human consciousness through other and higher media than that lent to it by physical mechanism. The eye is but a small part of man's organism compared with his whole body—but its power of expression exceeds that of all the rest. Magnitude, form, complexity, force, gravity, motion—all are to be estimated in their relation to spirit, simply by what they are able to evoke from it, or engender in it. Thus also must we appreciate the importance of facts having a moral purpose in them. Things are to us as is the measure of soul of which they can make us cognisant by their instrumentality. And it seems probable that man's nature should be to man's nature an apter, a more flexible, and, as it were, a more translucent medium of moral ideas, emanating from the uncreated source, than any mere material existence, or system of material existence *can* be. Not all that may be learned of God, as we have already seen—little or nothing of that higher knowledge of him which sways the will and captivates the heart—can be acquired from the mechanism of the physical universe. Those aspects of his being and perfections which are best made known to us by moral *action*, and of which the moral action can be best understood and appreciated when developed by a human life, are higher in their nature, more ennobling and purifying in their influence, worthier of being displayed by him and of being contemplated and studied by us, than any which could be reflected by natural laws and processes. Whatever, consequently, gives tangibility, durability, and universality, to this more elevated and more delicate medium of spiritual expression, should be estimated by rational beings, not for what it may chance to be in itself, but for its adaptation to great ends. He who sneers at any revelation of God by means of a book, ought to show that

it is impossible for a book to become the point of contact between the soul of man and an adequate moral representation of God—and that in preserving and embalming, for all men in all ages, facts illustrative of the Deity, it necessarily loses the aroma and essential spirit of them, which alone it is of consequence to retain. Biography, judged of by this novel canon of sceptical philosophy, is insipid and profitless as a study, compared with the observation of the structure and habits of a living worm—and human heroism, if the series of facts by which it is displayed are to be met with now only on the historic page, is less worth the notice of an inquiring mind than the knowledge which may be derived from the dissection of a frog's hind leg, or from the chemical analysis of a parcel of guano. To all that is asserted or implied by the objection under present consideration, the reply seems to us as decisive as we think it may be brief—first, that moral ideas and sentiments can be most fitly expressed by moral action—and, secondly, that moral action, to be of force beyond extremely narrow limits both of time and space, must be photographed by a written record.

§ 3. ADVANTAGES OF POSITION IN WHICH A REVELATION IS PLACED  
BY A RECORD.

But we submit that a calm and unbiassed consideration of the whole case will carry us safely much further than this. Not only is a record of some sort a necessity, in the case of any exhibition of God through the medium of humanity, at least if the world in general is to derive benefit from it, but it also has peculiar and exclusive advantages of no slight worth. The first of these is obvious at a glance. Such truth as God has designed to communicate respecting himself, his relations to us, and our duties to him, will be a boon to the race, valuable in proportion to the ease with which it can be disseminated in its integrity. The language of facts is but little dependent for its intelligibility, or even its impressiveness, on the language of the tongue—and it matters little to their moral power what may be the verbal version in which they are conveyed to the mind, so that the facts themselves are faithfully described, and

truthfully interpreted. Hence, variety of tongues among men constitutes but a temporary impediment to the diffusion of revealed truth—an impediment easily removed, and once surmounted is surmounted for all future time. Nor should it be lost sight of that a revelation thus enshrined is easy of access to individuals—no trivial characteristic in a busy world like this. We need not go far in search of it. No wearisome, expensive, perilous pilgrimage must be the precursor of our familiar acquaintance with its beauties. It may be made a companion through all the chequered scenes of life. We may commune with it in the closet. We may converse with it by the wayside. In the depths of the forest, on the trackless paths of the ocean, upon the hill-top, in the cheerless mine, wherever our disposition or our avocation may summon us, we may still take with us that treasure, and avail ourselves of all its fulness of blessings. It may always be kept at hand to refresh our spirits in the brief intervals of leisure snatched from the dusty turmoil and business of life—and in those long hours of vacancy and inaction forced upon us by bodily indisposition, it may become a resource and a solace tinged with hope and gladness even the gloom of a sick chamber. To the man who believes that the mind of his great and beneficent Creator has been graciously expressed in a series of human facts, it is matter of thankfulness that the record of those facts—the outward wrapping of truths inestimably precious—the continent of a boundless spiritual world—is within easy reach at any moment of life. This is one of the high but incidental benefits of a moral revelation, that the mechanical casket which contains it, and without which it could neither have been preserved nor distributed, is so suitable in dimensions to our daily and individual use. And yet within that little space there *may* be, even the most sceptical must admit—there *is*, as the Christian believes, an inexhaustible fund of knowledge, and store of whatever may sustain and develop spiritual life, greater than our utmost need, outstretching far our widest capacities. The material universe, however instructive, is but a cumbersome and inaccessible volume in comparison of this. Moreover, how readily and cheaply is it multiplied! The seed



of divine life, assuming it to be such, in what other external form could it have been given us so capable of indefinite reproduction? To us it may be, and is, a perplexing problem, that the arts by which a written communication of mind to mind may be struck off by myriads, with but little expense either of time or labour, were discovered and matured so late in the world's history—although, as we have already seen, any objection affecting divine revelation, or the means of its promulgation, founded upon this and kindred facts, impugns the wisdom of God's providential government. Meanwhile, thus much is certain—that in the advantages secured to mind by scientific discoveries, the record which transmits to us God's revelation of himself by his Son, has its full share. If the gospel be what it purports to be, we, of this age at all events, and all who come after us, have little reason to complain that it has been handed down to us in the shape of a book. Admitting that the instrument is one capable of putting glorious truths respecting God into contact with the heart, it is plainly a recommendation of it to us, rather than a detraction from its merits, that it will admit of being multiplied to an unlimited extent, without losing in the process a single particle of its virtue, and that there attaches to it no essential condition which would preclude it from being in the possession of every individual on the face of the earth. The arrangement surely, might have been otherwise. It is not every blessing' desirable for man which allows of this easy and indefinite reduplication. In our estimation, therefore, the fact that a spiritual revelation embalmed in a record does admit of being thus multiplied and distributed, is so far an item to be carried to the credit side of the balance of advantage or disadvantage attaching to what has been contemptuously designated "a book-revelation of God."

There is, however, a further consideration bearing on the point now under discussion, which ought not to be overlooked. It will be admitted, we suppose, that it is to our religious sentiment mainly, any display of God through human nature may be expected to make its appeal. It is obviously fitting that if any approach is to be made to us in this manner, the para-



mount object of it must be to quicken in us a spiritual life, and to develop it into such a governing power over life of every other kind as its superior intrinsic excellence demands for it. But if this be so, then it follows that in the agency employed for this purpose, all that is subordinate and auxiliary only should be so arranged as to interfere as little as possible with the primary end to be answered. Every artist who understands his profession will recognise the abstract propriety, at least, of this rule. If his picture is designed to represent some one idea, he will deem it unwise and unartistical to give prominence to objects which, instead of guiding the mind of the spectator to that idea, would arrest and divert the attention from it. Even supposing the painting itself to be faultless in this respect, it would still be a mistake to put it into a frame, the curious, elaborate, or imposing workmanship of which might catch and detain the notice which should rather be concentrated upon what it encloses. So, regard being had to moral effect alone, the acted drama is inferior in power to the written. The bustle of the stage, the scenery, the costumes, and all the other incidents of theatrical performance, tend so strongly to excite other emotions, and to elicit other sympathies, than the moral, that the main purport is forgotten, or but imperfectly realized, in the excitement of the more superficial susceptibilities of our nature. In like manner, a deep and permanent impression upon our religious sentiment is most likely to be produced when those feelings of humanity which lie nearer to the surface are not too strongly agitated. The very noise and pressure of passing events, more especially if in any way we are personally interested in them, usefully as they may operate in dispelling general listlessness, and so preparing us for subsequent reflection, usually prevent us from noticing "the still small voice" which issues from their midst, and which whispers to our conscience the moral lesson which those events embody. It is not until after excitement has subsided, and the atmosphere which surrounds us has become calm, that the inner man catches the tones of admonition, rebuke, or instruction, specially addressed to its attention. "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe

though one rose from the dead," seems to us a declaration of the profoundest philosophy. Where a religious result is to be reached by means of a circumstantial agency, that is the most favourable position of affairs, in which the circumstantial element is least obtrusive, and the religious most noticeable. It would have been a valid objection to Christianity, as a revelation of God to our moral nature, had the historical form in which it has been presented to our faith been so permanently vivid in its colouring as to have been more deeply interesting to us for its incidents, than for the divine truths they were intended to convey. So far from later generations having to regret their distance in point of time from New Testament scenes, as if it were a misfortune, we believe that they have quite as much reason to rejoice in it, as a superior privilege. For all the purposes of true spiritual life, the means and appliances within their reach are better tempered, if so we may express it, than they would have been found eighteen centuries ago. That very intensity of excitement which was then stirred up by near or passing events served rather to injure than to assist spiritual insight into the real import of the gospel; and it is a remarkable fact, that most of the heresies which afterwards grew up and choked the "good seed" of the word, may be traced up to germs which existed and were quickened at that very period. The religion of Christ, viewed too circumstantially in its objective character, became, almost necessarily, disproportionately imaginative, sentimental, and even physical, in its subjective character. Events having God in them, took a more forcible hold upon their minds than God in the events. The machinery of revelation attracted more notice than the main purport of it. The consequences were not long in making themselves felt, and, in process of time, grew to a magnitude which threatened the very extinction of Christianity as a spiritual power. The Church wholly misunderstood her mission, and instead of seeking to evoke a religious response from the hearts of men, or to promote the free development of their spiritual capabilities, she rapidly degenerated into a vulgar worldly power, relying for an external success upon craft and force. The Reformation has not wholly delivered us from this

tendency to materialism in worship and belief—and very slowly, and not without frequent relapses, are even Protestants accustoming themselves to look beyond what is but external and circumstantial in the religion they profess, and to set a paramount value upon its spiritual significance. Towards this happy consummation, however, aid is given by the providential arrangement which has subjected an historical revelation to the necessity of preservation in a written record. The chief interest attaching to the events of Christ's life must now, and henceforth, be predominantly one of a purely religious character. All that was novel, all that was marvellous, all that was fascinating to mere sentiment, or calculated to strike the fancy, has become so toned down and sobered by lapse of time, as to have brought out the eternally and unchangeably divine into strong relief, and the religious purport of gospel facts may now secure a large share of the attention which was once but too exclusively engrossed by the facts themselves. In a word, spiritual truth in the record is more likely to be recognised and responded to, than in the actual events the occurrence of which that record makes known to us—and the portraiture of the Supreme in human colours is all the better fitted to awaken an appropriate interest in our hearts now that the colouring matter has become mellowed and subdued into a simple bygone and written history. Every form in which Godhead displayed itself to our moral sympathies is thus preserved entire—whilst the glare which necessarily overspread the entire picture, as one of passing or recent occurrences, and which tended to arrest the mind rather than to direct it to the proper object, has passed away for ever, and to the eye of faith there remains a more spiritually impressive representation than ever of the Invisible God.

Conscious as we are of the extreme imperfection of the foregoing attempt to convey to others the idea which appears definite to our own mind, we still trust we have so far indicated what we mean, as to warrant our claiming for a *book*-revelation, if so the reader still chooses to call it, a moral advantage peculiar to itself. But be this as it may, enough has been said to redeem it from the contempt unthinkingly cast upon



it. Plainly, we are not justified in rejecting Christianity as unworthy of God because its facts, like all other historical facts, have been handed down to our knowledge in a written record. There is no abstract reason why such should not have been the case. They part with nothing whatever of their own spiritual meaning, nothing of their dignity, nothing of their religious power, in this process of transmission. What they have lost by it to our imagination, they have more than gained to our religious sense. Where the forms of truth have somewhat faded, the spirit of it has become more perceptible. And just as the *hortus siccus* of the botanist may serve his purely scientific purposes better than an excursion in the fields, so the historically-preserved events in which God displays the moral aspects of his character may be more advantageously submitted to the contemplation and reflection of the inner man for all the ends of religious life, than could have been the same events in their actual occurrence. Thus much, then, at least, we take to be demonstrable—and more than this it is not required of us by the argument that we should establish—namely, that a human-life manifestation of God, already shown to be needed and appropriate, involves the necessity of a record in order to practical and general usefulness—and that this obvious necessity brings with it no such disadvantage as might excite a just suspicion that any mode of appealing to our spiritual susceptibilities which incurs such necessity, is unsuitable for God to adopt, and unworthy of man to receive. The ground, therefore, is clear for further progress. The case is one in which, unless the whole of our foregoing train of argument is fallacious, a record of some sort is admissible. It is not irrational to look for a divine revelation, such as we have endeavoured to explain it, in a *book*. A Scripture religion is not *per se* an absurdity. Men are not justified by their reason in rejecting as a communication from God, that which is first brought under their notice by a volume penned by their fellow men—or if so, the conclusion must be made good by a much clearer and more convincing logic than that which can be packed into a bold assertion, or a supercilious sneer. Meanwhile, and until this has been effected, we



shall deem ourselves authorised to proceed with our argument, and, assuming it to have been proved that a record is not abstractedly objectionable, we shall discuss the question whether the Bible, taken as a whole, can be rationally accepted as a fitting and trustworthy record of a manifestation of God to man.

§ 4. SUBJECT MATTER OF THE RECORD CLASSIFIED.

Dealing, then, as we think ourselves fairly entitled to do, with the books of the New Testament, which we regard as the efflorescence, or matured development, of the entire religious system at present under discussion, we may classify their subject-matter into two broad divisions—statements of fact, and explanations of the spiritual bearing of fact. We do not pretend that every line, or even every book, contained in the New Testament canon, will find an appropriate place under one or other of these heads—but we presume to think that the classification embraces so large a portion of the volume as to render it quite unnecessary to the argument that we should interrupt the course of it by frequent and specific reference to the small part not included in this grouping. A passage of history, and its religious meaning, constitute, in brief, the sum and substance of that singular collection of writings which has been the basis of faith to so many men, in so many successive ages. It will be convenient, with a view to clearness, that we should look at each of these divisions of the subject-matter separately—and, on the hypothesis that taken together they record the mind and will of God as displayed in the person and life of a man, it is incumbent on us to ascertain, as precisely as we are able, the demands of reason in reference to each, which must be fully met before we can avail ourselves of them as legitimate foundations of belief. What do we require of a record such as this purports to be? What, as rational and accountable beings, have we a right, or are we bound, to demand of such an instrument professedly fashioned with a view to such an object? As to the history—the description of what is supposed to have occurred, or to have been done—how shall we satisfy the intellect that it may be accepted

as a substantially accurate account of realities? And as to the doctrinal significance attached to it, and inferences deduced from it, by what considerations should our religious sense be determined in embracing or repudiating it? These are the general questions we have to dispose of—having done which the ground will be cleared for determining the extent of credit due to the writers of both Testaments.

§ 5. WHAT REASON MAY REQUIRE OF A RECORD IN RELATION TO ITS STATEMENTS OF FACT.

Our first business will be to get as precise and angular a notion as possible of the gist of the inquiry upon which we are now about to enter. Both advocates and opponents of Christianity appear to us to have lost themselves, and wasted much unnecessary argument, in consequence of a too hasty deviation from the beaten path of the ordinary, for the less visible regions of the extraordinary. It is far from surprising that such should have been the case. Men who have realized high spiritual enjoyment in a cordial belief of revealed truth, and who have observed its elevating and purifying influence upon the minds of others—men who verily believe that the ideas of God and themselves which have taken such deep hold of their sympathies, and exert so happy a power over their hearts, are truly, and must needs be, divine—men who cannot but be conscious, gratefully conscious, that spiritual life has been awakened in them by knowledge derived in the first instance from the Holy Scriptures—may well be pardoned for identifying results so unspeakably important to themselves with the direct agency of God, and for regarding the instrument of producing these results as wrought and fashioned by his special intervention. It would have been difficult to have convinced a Jew who had just witnessed the parting of the waters of the Red Sea under the uplifted rod of Moses, that the rod itself possessed no special virtue, but that in material, in properties, in liabilities, it was just such as any other rod might be. Assuming it to have been a fact—for the illustration's sake—that a *vis divina* was put forth in connexion with the rod, and supposing some unbeliever of that day to have questioned the

direct interference of the Deity at all—it will be obvious at a glance that discussion between the believing Jew and his sceptical brother as to whether God was or was not working by Moses for the deliverance of Israel, could not be logically nor advantageously taken upon the narrow and really irrelevant question—irrelevant, we mean, as to the pending issue—whether or no the rod by which the Jewish legislator performed his miracles was itself divinely fashioned. So in the case before us. The true point of dispute between us and unbelievers, is whether God has been pleased to display himself to our religious nature in and by the person and life of Jesus Christ, and whether those aspects of character which are believed to have been so displayed are worthy of him, and are eminently adapted to become the means of spiritual life to men—and, *towards this particular issue*, whatever may be advanced on either side touching the inspiration of the *record* is beside the mark. It is not needed, in order to show satisfactorily that there is a divine revelation *in* the record, to prove that the record is *itself* divine. It is not sufficient, with a view to disprove that revelation, to point out marks of infirmity on the face of the record such as no instrument framed by the hand of God could be rationally expected to exhibit. It strikes us as peculiarly inconvenient, and strongly calculated to mislead, to wage controversy mainly upon a question which, in respect of the real difference between the parties at issue, is collateral rather than direct. Not that the question of inspiration is an uninteresting or unimportant one—nor that unsound views regarding it are to be looked upon as of no great practical consequence. What we mean—*all* that we would be understood to mean—and what we shall hereafter attempt to make good, is this—that the spiritual authority of that revelation of his character and designs which God has vouchsafed to us by Jesus Christ, resides in the *facts* of which that life consisted, and not in the written *record* of those facts—and that even if it could be demonstrated that the penmen who have given us memorials of that life, and of the events which were preparatory to, and consequent upon, it, were indebted to no other aid than that supplied by mental and moral qualifications which



any other writers might possess in common with themselves, the main strength of Christianity, as a communication to mankind of God's mind and will, would remain untouched.

We must ask the reader who disputes this position to consign to momentary oblivion all the ideas which he has been wont to associate with the New Testament, considered as a collection of sacred books, and by an effort of imagination, to place himself—in Corinth, say,—at a period prior to the publication of any one of them, but still subsequent to the death of Jesus Christ. We shall assume that the events of which we have a circumstantial account in the gospels actually occurred, and that the interpretation put upon them by the apostle Paul is the correct one. We *assume* these points—but merely with a view to show the proper relation of the New Testament to them—or, in other words, of the record to the revelation. Well, on the hypothesis that Christ's life was a pre-ordained manifestation of God to men, and that his personal history is a human development of the Divine thought and will regarding them, what quality would have been absolutely requisite to give authority to an *oral* communication of the facts of the case, and of their spiritual meaning, to one occupying the position in which the reader has been requested to fancy himself placed? Let us see.

A native of Corinth, then, living about the year A.D. 50, having heard strange rumours respecting a newly introduced faith, is anxious to investigate its claims on his reception. Not one of the documents on which dependence is now implicitly placed by the Christian world has yet made its appearance. It will scarcely be pretended that this man's position precludes the possibility of his arriving at a conclusive and rational result until after the New Testament penmen shall have given their respective writings to the world. The first care of our inquirer would be to ascertain, as fully and as accurately as possible, all the facts, a knowledge of which might be deemed necessary to guide his judgment. Let us suppose that, after considerable search, he has succeeded in finding four men who profess themselves qualified to furnish him with ample and trustworthy information. What will be the criterion to which



his reason will compel him to refer their several statements, in order to determine whether, on a matter of such moment, he may accept them as a basis of his future religious belief? Would it occur to him to ask whether these witnesses and informants, in laying before him their respective accounts of what they had themselves seen and heard, or had perhaps received directly from eye and ear witnesses, were exercising the ordinary faculties of men, or were prompted, directed, and controlled, in the whole of their testimony, by a divine *afflatus*, specially vouchsafed to them for the purpose? If, moreover, these oral historians put forth no such pretensions on their own behalf, is it conceivable that our inquirer's reason would suggest that he ought to regard them as, at least, implying as much, and that no examination of their statements separately, or in comparison one with the other, ought to satisfy him, which should not elicit results in perfect harmony with this arbitrarily adopted standard? If, indeed, the facts were of a nature rendering it impossible for men to testify to, or describe them, by the use of their unassisted intellectual powers, judgment might properly be suspended until evidence of inspiration had been produced. But although it requires divine power to give sight to the blind, and to raise the dead, it cannot be pretended that an accurate account of these miraculous occurrences cannot be given by eye-witnesses, unless they are prompted thereto by supernatural influence. There is no passage, that we remember, in the life of our Lord, which might not have been freely and precisely communicated by one man to another, by the simple exercise of those ordinary faculties which are usually tasked to produce a trustworthy narrative of events. Even in regard to the discourses of Jesus, recorded at such length by the apostle John, after the lapse, too, of many years, a quick and retentive memory, aided only by appliances common enough in all ages, may be supposed to have sufficed for their accurate preservation, without trespassing beyond well known boundaries of probability. Instances are common enough in our every-day life, of powers of recollection far exceeding in strength what would have been required for the production of John's gospel—and it is surely

not beyond the range of fair conjecture that scenes and sayings which made so deep an impression on the minds of Christ's more immediate followers as to have altered the whole after-current of their lives, would, very soon after his departure from among them, be committed to writing in order to preservation, and, perhaps, distribution. Be this as it may, the imaginary Corinthian inquirer might have properly received the substance of the history which has been handed down to us, in oral communications differing much, or not differing at all, from those embalmed for us in a written record, in style, tone, manner, and drapery, without rendering it necessary that the individuals to whom he was indebted for their information, should have been divinely assisted. As a rational man, his cross-examination of the witnesses, his comparisons of their testimony, his critical inquisition on the materials placed before him (always, however, supposing him to have been in pursuit only of a conclusion satisfactory to his judgment), would have related to their competency and reliableness as witnesses, not to the question whether or not their minds were under direct divine guidance. And if this man could be thoroughly assured that his informants were placing facts before him, those facts, assuming them to be the same in substance as those narrated by the evangelists, would have constituted as solid a basis for his belief in a divine revelation by Jesus Christ, as any which we possess in the present day. It is plain, then, that to him, the question of inspiration would not, and ought not, to have been entertained and discussed, as fundamental to the question of a divine revelation. The religious authority over his conscience of the facts communicated to him, would lie, not in any previous conviction that the persons to whom he had been indebted for them were inspired by the Spirit of God, but in the sufficiency of the proof put before him, that the witnesses had told him things which had really occurred.

Now, we submit to the reader, with some confidence, that in all that relates to *statements of fact*, the written record which we have in the New Testament is fairly open to such tests, with a view to the satisfaction of our reason, as might have been applied to oral testimony, in the case supposed, and to

such only. The criteria of truth, which might have been properly referred to in the one instance, are the only criteria to which proper reference can be made in the other. The spoken testimony, and the written testimony, are subject to precisely the same rules. Such guarantees of integrity and competency as might have satisfied the mind in the one case, may satisfy it in the other. Such mistakes (not touching the heart of the matter borne witness to), as in oral testimony might have been held consistent with thorough knowledge of what was essential in the story, may be so regarded and treated also in a written record. Such discrepancies between the statements of the witnessing parties, as, in the first position, would have been reasonably looked upon as confirmatory of their independence of each other, and of their conscientious adherence to the fact as it appeared to them, may be looked upon in the same manner, and with a like result, in the last. All the indications of individual or national peculiarity—all the modes of describing occurrences true, because well understood, in the locality of the speaker, but not strictly true in other places—all the omissions, or redundancies, which find a reasonable explanation in the special purpose of each narrator—all matters, in fine, which serve to stamp individuality on the information imparted, and to show that the same objects have been seen by different persons, but from different, and, perhaps, opposite points of view—all are to be allowed for, and respected, and held reconcilable with a truthfulness that may be implicitly relied upon, in our critical analysis of New Testament history, as in our supposed inquirer's cross-examination of living witnesses. To him, evidence that God had showed himself to man by means of a human life would present itself, if at all, in the facts of that life, quite independently of the eccentricities of manner, speech, and opinion, exhibited by the narrators in the communication of those facts. One informant may have blundered in geography, another may have been mistaken in an historical reference, a third may have misquoted or misapplied some prophetic allusion, a fourth may have furnished important information never hinted at by his fellow-witnesses, and all may have given ample proof that their minds were not free



from the influence of traditions vulgarly received in the locality to which they respectively belonged—but unless these peculiarities and infirmities touched their competency to give information on the material points of their story, or betrayed a want of integrity, they would naturally have been dismissed as incidents having no bearing whatever on the main issue. Taking together all the statements deposed to by his informants, our Corinthian inquirer, willing to believe where he found sufficient evidence, would have rationally required satisfaction on two points—first, assuming the statements to be substantially correct, do the facts described carry on the face of them a moral demonstration that Jesus Christ was, what he assumed to be, the “way” to the Father—and if so, secondly, is the testimony sufficient to sustain the main body of the facts? Reasonable assurance on these two points would constitute also a reasonable basis of belief in Christianity as a divine revelation.

The historical books of the New Testament, then, stand between us and the life in which God is alleged to have revealed himself, precisely in the position which would have been occupied by living witnesses, had it been our lot to have lived in the interval between the death of Christ and the dates at which they were originally published—they answer to us the same purpose—they are open to the same kind of critical examination—and, in case of their sustaining that examination, they conduct us to the same legitimate result. Their authority consists in the nature of the facts a knowledge of which they transmit to us, and in the ascertained integrity and competency of the men who wrote them. Supposing them to be lucid *media* through which to look at the outline of Christ's life—supposing that by means of them we really get at what he did, and said, and suffered, and what several of his followers did, and said, and suffered, for his sake, after he was parted from them—we are brought front to front with that body of facts in which, according to the pretensions of Christianity, we have a moral revelation of the unseen God. It is a perfectly fair question whether a man openly professing the purpose which Jesus Christ professed, exemplifying his character, doing



his works, and vindicated by a resurrection to which he had previously appealed as the crowning proof of his mission, should or should not be regarded as setting forth to man's sympathies the moral aspects of the Deity. And again, it is a fair question whether this alleged series of facts be or be not the mere creation of over-excited fancy. But it is not a question relevant to the main issue, whether the record through which we make acquaintance with those facts is free from blemishes, perfectly immaterial though they may be, found to attach to every other record. Our theories, indeed, may require that such should be the case—our reason, assuredly, makes no such demand. We place the record in a false position, and do it a gross injustice, when we treat it as if *it* were the revelation, instead of being only the window, as it were, through which we look out and see one. We subject it to a vast amount of superfluous, and, we may add, unfair criticism and cavil, by our misapprehension of its true place and functions. It is as though we persisted in maintaining that the glass through which we looked at the moon is identical with the heavenly body seen by its aid, and that every speck of defilement on the surface of the glass pertains, not to the medium of our vision, but to the object which shines through it. The strange and mistaken fancy might be of little consequence to ourselves—but another, adopting our theory, might shake our faith in the reality of the object seen by proving that no such appearances as are given to it by the glass we use, can, by any possibility, belong to the moon itself.

The foregoing observations, supposing them to be well founded, warrant us in affirming that if it be the fact, that hostile criticism hath hitherto failed in shaking the character of the historical writers of the New Testament, either in respect of their conscientiousness—of their *meaning* to tell the truth—or in respect of their competency—of their having within reach the materials of truth, and being qualified to form a correct judgment of it—then criticism, whatever else it may have done, and whatever minor charges it may have established against these penmen, has left untouched the foundations of a rational faith in Christianity as

a revelation of God. The showing of God to men, happily, as we venture to think, is effected by means of something far less liable to derangement, to misunderstanding, and to the possible accidents of time, which could have been guarded against only by a perpetual miracle, than it would have been had it depended upon any mere collocation of words, or any dogmatic expression of belief. The display is made in a glorious life, in describing the main features of which truthful men well acquainted with it *could* not greatly err, whatever their common liabilities to incidental and trivial inaccuracy. Such being the *mode* of revelation, the world needs not that it should be looked at through any more transparent medium than the conscientious narratives of credible witnesses—and if the gospels can fairly maintain this character, the authority of the revelation, and, surely, to a great extent, its moral power also, will still survive any conceivable settlement of the controversy as to how far they are the result of divine inspiration.\* The memoirs of a great man do not lose their suggestive nor their educational virtue, because written by a biographer open to much censure—nor can the life of the divine man be in any danger of failing of its transcendent purpose, because in the verbal sketches of it traces may, perchance, be discoverable that the writers themselves were not in all things infallible.

\* The Author may, perhaps, be permitted to declare his own unflinching belief that the writers of New Testament history *were* under divine guidance in composing their several memoirs of Christ. In the *selection* of their facts, he sees a contribution by independent minds to one unique and consistent result—a perfect and beautifully harmonious portraiture of “the man, Christ Jesus.” This result he takes to be a very important one in its bearing upon the spiritual regeneration of the world, and hence, he is led to ascribe it, not to accident, but design. That design, however, cannot plausibly be attributed to biographers who wrote without concert, and whose united productions bring out so complete a picture that none has been able to suggest an improving touch. Now he can conceive of a much less satisfactory use made of the materials within reach of the evangelists, without impeachment of their integrity or competency—and he attributes the unity of effect, unconsciously produced by separate instrumentalities, to the directing influence upon them of one mind—the mind of the ever-blessed God. But this belief crosses at no single point the path of argument followed out in the text.

If we have solid ground upon which to rest a belief, that Jesus Christ professed, and acted, and spoke, and suffered, as he is represented to have done in the four gospels—and we must ascertain this by the application of precisely the same tests as we bring to bear upon all other historical works—there exists for us, whatever may be our speculations on the nature and extent of Divine assistance vouchsafed to the writers, a bright mirror in which to see reflected the moral lineaments of the Deity. Whether this will correspond with the entire scope of our religious want, is a question which may admit of further discussion. But thus much appears to us certain—that the advocates of Christianity as a revelation of God have done all that can be required of them by the soberest reason, in vindication of the New Testament as a record of facts, when they have succeeded in placing the history upon a level for trustworthiness with ancient history in general, and in showing that the writers were as truthful in their purpose, as conscientious in their statements, and as capable of testing the worth of their materials, as any men of any age, whose historical works have come down to us. We think much more than this can be done—but this, we contend, will amply suffice for a solid basis of reasonable belief.

#### § 6. UNFAIR CRITICISM RESORTED TO BY MODERN SCEPTICS.

Sceptical writers of recent times have subjected the New Testament historians to a process of criticism so powerfully destructive in its operation, that, if universally applied, it would leave the world without a single shred of history upon which reliance could be placed. It is called philosophical—but, in point of fact, it is almost exclusively dogmatic. It is a solvent which gets rid of impurities, by getting rid of the substance to which they attach. It starts with a broad assertion, unsustained by argument, which arbitrarily sets aside as incredible the main body of almost every important fact recorded in the gospels. This done, it sets to work upon the tissue of circumstances by which each fact is environed—and having detected fewer or more discrepancies, as the case may be, it leaves upon the minds of the unwary an



impression that the fact itself has been demolished. A simple illustration will show the mode in which this criticism works. Let the historical subject selected for examination by the process be "The Gunpowder Plot." The first step to be taken is a bold, unqualified denial of the possibility of so wild a project having entered into the head of any living man, involving, as it did, the certain and horrible death of the instrument necessary to its successful execution. The ordinary laws of human nature are unaccountably reversed—and hence Guy Fawkes can be regarded by no man who puts any value upon his reputation for intelligence as a real historical personage. The event which we now celebrate on the fifth of November was not an actual occurrence, and what we find relating to it in the books of history, is plainly nothing more than a mythic representation of the great fact of the age—the providential and signal triumph of Protestantism over the wiles of Popery. The mind having been thus shaken in its belief by mere hardihood of asseveration, and dragged into the suspicion that the whole story is but an invention, is invited to a critical examination and close comparison of the several accounts which have been transmitted to us of this famous passage in our country's history. But observe, the temper in which the investigation is gone into is already one unfavourable to the truthfulness of the witnesses to be summoned. It will prove hard, indeed, if in some three or four independent narratives of the same event, apparent, and, possibly, real discrepancies of statement cannot be detected—an omission of some important link in the chain of events by one writer—a difference in the attitude and bearing of the chief conspirator when discovered, as described by others—some diversities of statement as to what he said, what was his purpose, who were his accomplices, the circumstances of his trial, and the incidents connected with his execution—in short, a rather formidable muster of seemingly unaccountable and contradictory averments, which cannot be satisfactorily elucidated, as in the case of *vivá voce* witnesses, by further questioning, nor reconciled by eliciting an omitted incident, so potent, in everyday experience, to explain otherwise inexplicable mysteries.



Now the characteristic vice of this mode of criticism is this—The substance of the narrative having been blown upon by a philosophic dogma, and the historians of the event being afterwards brought up for cross-examination as witnesses in a cause already adjudged to condemnation, every sign of non-agreement, every variation of detail, every apparent contrariety of statement, and every incident not really explained by the story itself, is set down as confirmatory of prior suspicions—that you are not dealing with an actual occurrence, but with a fiction. Now, try the fairness of this method by admitting the event as a reality. You have just the same diversities, perplexities, and contradictions to look at—but looking at them from the substantial truth of the story, they instantly assume another meaning. They show how possible it is, as we see every day, for men's descriptions of the same fact to differ when observed by them, as it were, at different angles of sight. They illustrate for us, what we cannot but have frequently noted in ordinary social intercourse, how strongly the purpose which an individual has in view, tells upon the course of any narrative of facts which inclination or duty may prompt him to give, and yet without laying him open to a just charge of untruthfulness. They prove to us the independence of honest witnesses. And they remind us of our liability to pass a hasty judgment on apparently irreconcilable statements, a key to the complete harmony of which is so often supplied to us by the veriest trifle of subsequently received information. Now, we affirm, without hesitation, that philosophical criticism has no right to practise upon us this double wrong. It is not justified in putting the gospel writers to this species of inquisitorial torture. It is not honest in first declaring a biographer to be a fictionist, and then labouring to extort a confession from his own lips. No history could stand the trial. No truth to be depended upon can be got at by the process. It is analogous to nothing which, between man and man, we commonly regard as frank and equitable dealing. If supernaturalism be a gross absurdity, by all means let it be shown to be such on separate and appropriate grounds. Let this conclusion be fairly established,

and we shall need no elaboration of criticism to crush our faith in the gospels. But until it is proved, reason does not bind us to proceed to an investigation of the New Testament narratives as if it were proved. Until we have been satisfied on this head, we do not feel ourselves precluded from admitting evidence which, in other matters, unless compelled by a foregone conclusion, we should never feel ourselves warranted in rejecting—nor do we consider ourselves bound to interpret discrepancies affecting only non-essential details of historical events, into proofs that the writers cannot be describing realities. We set something down, as we ought to do, to the character of the men—something, to their opportunities of acquaintance with the scenes and events which they portray—something, to the impracticability of their palming off a series of fictions upon observant contemporaries—something, to the ready belief and wide circulation which their works obtained—something, to the simplicity of their style—something, to the unaffected candour and deep sincerity of their tone—something, to the exquisite moral beauty of the character they have depicted—something, also, to the sublime spiritual purpose which gleams through the entire life of that man whose memoirs they have sketched—and we are not to be oblivious of all this instantly upon being told in an authoritative manner that a miracle is an impossibility; and, in the moment, and under the influence, of our forgetfulness, proceed to rake together all the superficial difficulties, anomalies, and contrarieties, which an already suspicious mind may torture into “confirmation strong as Holy Writ.” Our reason, whatever may be the case with others, constrains us to examine, as we have done, separately and apart, the question whether supernaturalism may be a necessary, a becoming, and a credible feature of any revelation to man by man of God’s moral character—and having determined that question in the affirmative, we find no justification for allowing incredulity to cast a dark shadow of suspicion over the history in which we discover a worthy purpose wrought out in connexion with an appropriate supernatural display. On the contrary, we feel ourselves impelled by what appear to us rational considera-

tions, to take our stand upon the preponderant proof in favour of the fidelity of the New Testament writers, and from that ground, rather than from a dogmatic position arbitrarily assumed, to pass in review, for the purpose of comparison, their several accounts of their Master's life and deeds—to take notice of their agreements, as well as their differences—to mark in what respects their separate testimonies induce conviction, and in what they suggest doubt—to weigh the substantiality of the one against the triviality of the other—to judge of their conflicting statements, in their bearing upon the trustworthiness of the penmen, according to those rules the benefit of which we should deem ourselves obliged to extend to all other historians—and to set down nothing as necessarily subversive of their credit which will admit of a probable explanation consistent with their honesty. For, be it remembered, these witnesses, strange as may be the facts to which they depose, come into court with a character which no mere criticism can set aside. They are heralded by events, and are surrounded by favouring probabilities, which no judgment can do wisely to overlook. And if they ask only that measure of respectful treatment which is readily accorded to profane historians, it cannot surely be unreasonable that their demand should be complied with. To this, however, our philosophical critics stoutly demur. They have already settled that no testimony can prove a miraculous event—and they expect others to join with them in regarding every real or seeming discrepancy as satisfactory evidence that these men are not to be believed. Now this is not the manner in which we are wont to act in courts of justice. Such are not the rules by which we test evidence in matters arising daily out of the common relationships of life. This is not the spirit in which we apply ourselves to ascertain historic facts in general. Therefore we hold that conclusions reached by means of such a process are not ordinarily depended upon as valid—and this being the case, we see no reason why we should subject the evangelical record to a violence of unfriendly criticism under the tortures of which all history would be obliged to confess itself a lie, and then expire.



§ 7. CONSIDERATIONS CORROBORATIVE OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE RECORD SUGGESTED BY THE PROBABLE SOURCE OF THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS.

When we look at some of the peculiar features of the record itself, we discover marks upon it, which, while they strongly corroborate the integrity of the writers, open up to us also the probable sources of those diversities and discrepancies of statement upon which such unfavourable stress has been laid by modern critics of the philosophical school. Every one must be struck with the remarkable similarity of the first three gospels—showing itself sometimes in the selection of the same occurrences for description, sometimes in the order in which the occurrences are narrated, and sometimes in the use, throughout whole passages, of the selfsame words. Combined, however, with this similarity, there are not only material differences in all three respects, but there are also upon the face of each gospel such characteristics as must satisfy the mind that each writer had access to a considerable stock of materials common to all; that each also availed himself, to some extent, of information either not possessed or not used by the other two; and that each so far modified what passed through his hands, as to leave upon his work a well-defined and cognisable stamp of his own individuality of purpose, style, and manner. Ancient patristical writers make mention of a gospel by Matthew, written in Hebrew, and published and circulated among the churches in Judea at a very early date. This gospel, it is thought, constituted the common root out of which eventually sprang the three which we now possess. But another suggestion has been made of late, deserving considerable attention. During the interval between the death of Jesus Christ and the publication of the first gospel, a large number of converts was made, and not a few churches must have been scattered over the face of what we now call the Holy Land. Authentic information respecting the life and ministry of the Messiah would, of course, be earnestly coveted by these Christian societies—indeed, we can hardly imagine how they could have been “built up in the faith,” save as a solid groundwork was laid in the communication to them of historic facts. Upon



facts the new religion was based, and, no doubt, much of the "preaching of the kingdom," by the apostles and elders, would partake of the historical cast, and be largely intermingled with narrative memorials of their risen Lord. Every passage of this kind, authenticated by apostolic or other competent authority, would be carefully committed to writing, and preserved by the brotherhood to whom it may have been communicated. In process of time, there would exist among the churches of Judea, but in a detached and scattered shape, written records of most of the remarkable incidents in the life of Christ—and, probably, neighbouring churches would freely intercommunicate copies of such biographical statements as might at any time have come into their possession. Thus, for several years, circulating notes containing detached passages of the life of our Lord would constitute, as it were, the New Testament of the churches. The imperfection and danger attaching to this mode of diffusing historical knowledge would very soon become apparent—and hence the necessity of collecting, comparing, authenticating, and arranging them, and giving them to the churches in a compact and reliable form. This seems to have been first done by the apostle Matthew, and had the limits of the Christian church been confined to Syria, no second work of the kind would probably have been judged necessary. As circumstances not requiring to be here detailed rendered it expedient to prepare other compilations, Mark and Luke severally, and each with the view of meeting a special want, undertook the work—the one, it is said, under the supervision of the apostle Peter—the other, perhaps, guided by the wise suggestions of the apostle Paul. Both these writers, as well as Matthew, would find the bulk of their materials in the circulating historical notes already alluded to, of each of which it may be fairly supposed that many copies were in existence. Now if this conjecture approaches the truth of the case—and, let it be borne in mind that besides answering external probabilities, it is suggested and corroborated by internal indications—the close resemblances, and the minor diversities, of these three gospels are naturally accounted for. Of the most remarkable incidents of the life of Christ there would be

almost as many copies as there were separate churches, the greater part of them derived, it may be, from the same original source, but differing slightly from each other, partly in consequence of unintentional changes made by the copyists, partly, perhaps, owing to some touch of emendation or correction, or explanation, made by some disciple personally cognisant of the event described. The materials thus distributed over a pretty wide surface would be collected by each of our three evangelists, who would range them in the order, correct them in the wording, add or take away explanatory matter, and present them in a foreshortened or extended aspect, as might best serve, according to his judgment, the interests of truth, and best fall in with his particular object and plan. It is, of course, impossible now to *prove* that this was the mode in which these separate memorials were originally constructed, but it is equally unreasonable to contend that a process somewhat resembling this was not adopted—or, in other words, that there were not in circulation among the Jewish churches oral or written accounts of the more prominent facts of the Messiah's history, long prior to the publication of the evangelical records, and available, and, in all likelihood, made use of, in the production of those works. Now, in connexion with this view of the origin of the three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we beg the reader's attention to the following remarks. Very many, if not most, of the wonderful incidents narrated by these penmen, are distinctly associated with a given town, village, or district, the name of which is set forth. Often, too, the effect upon the inhabitants of the locality specified produced by a particular miracle, or by a cluster of supernatural works, is broadly stated, intimating, to say the least, that a deep and general sensation had been excited. In the East, and especially at that period, the general seclusion, quiet, and, we may almost add, torpor, of provincial life, would constitute an atmosphere in which the memory of a striking supernatural occurrence would keep fresh and green for a long succession of years, and would be the topic of frequent conversation for one generation at least. It is fair to suppose, and, in truth, the idea starts up in one's mind with irresistible force, that almost

the first place to which any given passage of Christ's history would travel, whether preserved in an oral tradition, or in the shape of a written circular note, would be that with which the passage was identified. Either, then, it would, or it would not, be verified by the recollections of the neighbourhood. If *not* verified in the great majority of instances, how are we to account for the continuance and growth of churches in the very districts where pretended facts had turned out fictions, and how came it that a "sect everywhere spoken against," and often pursued and persecuted with malignant fury, wholly escaped the charge of forging the events on which they founded their asseverations that Jesus was the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world? On the other hand, if these detached bits of biography *did* obtain credence in the places with which they are boldly said to have been originally connected, it could only have been in consequence of tallying in the main with the reminiscences of the inhabitants. But this being so—and we confess that, so far as our knowledge goes of men's ways and tendencies, and of the ordinary course of things in our everyday world, it must have been so, or something very like it—then it follows, that, within twenty years (assuming the longest period), a goodly proportion of the historical statements comprised in the first three gospels were authenticated by the public recollection of the particular neighbourhoods to which they have been assigned—and thus we have not only the guarantee of the writer's character for the general accuracy of his memoirs, but, in addition to it, the tacit corroboration of the people of each place in which any miraculous work is said to have been wrought. We know not how other minds may be impressed by these considerations, but, for ourselves, we are bound to profess that we feel an infinitely greater intellectual difficulty in accounting for the escape, to this day, from refutation and demolition, of statements of pretended fact which, if mere inventions, were exposed to so early an ordeal, and which could have been so triumphantly exposed in every locality with which the writers had rashly connected them; than we do to reconcile the discrepancies between the several gospels, dragged to the light by modern criticism, with the



historic fidelity of their respective writers. The effort required in the first case involves a painful and intolerable strain upon our common sense. In the last, every natural probability aids one in the accomplishment of his task. The first hypothesis involves a result contradictory of all experience—the last is sustained by the simple application of rules universally resorted to in framing a judgment on history. Far harder does it seem to us to push aside evangelic facts than to harmonize, or, at least, account for, evangelic incompatibilities of statement.

§ 8. DISTINCTIONS TO BE ATTENDED TO IN FAIR HISTORICAL  
CRITICISM.

Modern criticism, however, has not confined its analytical operations to a detection of disagreements between the New Testament biographers. It has also fastened upon a number of so-called flaws in the record which, although they do not touch either the fidelity or the competency of the writers, and, therefore, derogate in no way from the authority of revelation, tend greatly to perplex and stumble unpractised combatants in this controversial arena. Now we venture to suggest a few common-place observations which, perhaps, may set the minds of others at rest, as they have certainly done ours. A preliminary remark or two will serve to give them additional force.

What, then, we may ask, was the world's want which, on the hypothesis that God has revealed himself to mankind in his Son, these memorials of his life were needed to supply? Surely, a knowledge of what Christ was, and did, and said, and endured, in which our religious sympathies might recognise, and respond to, the moral character and purpose of the Everlasting Father. Given, then, a record in which this knowledge may be surely and readily found, and we have no right either to complain of, nor be surprised at, much less shocked with, any characteristics on the face of the record which, depreciating in no degree its material value, nor obstructing in any manner its important end, may, nevertheless, be tinged, more or less, with the common hue of human imperfection. For example, if it should be found that these faithful witnesses have delivered their testimony in not wholly unexceptionable



Greek—or that in some matters, not touching their main object (matters, it may be, geographical, ethnological, or philosophical), they are not enlightened above the common standard of their times and station—or that they have adopted habits, whether of thought, of speech, or of action, which, perfectly innocent in themselves, might yet be smiled at, as founded in misapprehension, by such as have profited by the lengthened subsequent experience of the world, and by the progress of science—if, in a word, it should appear that the historic writers of the New Testament were really men of the age in which they lived, men of the country in which they were born and educated, men subject to the then limitations of general knowledge, men of individual tendencies, tastes, temperaments, passions, and even prejudices—and if, in transmitting to distant generations, by means of their writings, a perfectly accurate historical portraiture of the Messiah in whom they trusted and whom they loved unto death, they must be admitted to have so far exemplified the above suppositions as to render the fact cognisable to every diligent student of their works—wherein is the world the worse for this, and, in what respect could our reason have wished it otherwise? We protest, we do not see. On the contrary, we feel it to be an advantage, that the divine light emanating from the life of Jesus Christ, should reach us through an artless, and thoroughly human medium, and that the record should be such as will not only allow, but invite our most searching examination of its every passage with the same freedom with which we investigate the laws of Nature, and which will engage us to pause and ponder, meditate and adore, stirred, awed, or enrapt, rather by divinely significant facts, than by the verbal dress in which they may chance to show themselves. It is no misfortune, in our judgment, but quite the opposite, that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels”—and, just as children listening to descriptions of a monarch’s court, or of a prince’s power and beneficence, are glad to be reminded by some homely phrase or accent, by some familiar tone or gesture, that a mother is the speaker, so, to us, such traces on the page of evangelic history as mark the writers for men—honest, faith-

ful, competent to their task—but yet, verily and indeed men—bring their entire narrative much more closely home to our sympathies, and set us upon a more ardent search for the spirit in its several portions, than would have been the case had it been possible for us to have received precisely the same story written by the faultless pen of some superior being.

Influenced by the feeling to which we have just given but a feeble and inadequate expression—willing to test, to the furthest legitimate extent, the trustworthiness of the witnesses on every point which is covered by the object for which we are dependent on their testimony—we can also, without perilling one jot of our faith, bear to take statements at their hands, connected only collaterally with the purpose they have in view, with precisely the same freedom to receive or to reject, as in the case of any other writer. For example, if two individuals professing to give, from reliable information, the memoirs of some great man's life, should prefix to their respective biographies a very different genealogical account of his ancestry, up to a very remote period, we should discover, in the fact, no good ground for cherishing the slightest suspicion either of their fidelity or their general accuracy. Their real object is to exhibit the man himself, and a catalogue of his progenitors, although associated with, cannot be regarded as essential to, that object. They *must*, in this instance, rely upon information furnished them by others, the accuracy of which in every particular it may be wholly out of their power to verify. It is possible that, for many imaginable reasons, different branches of the same family, where the line of descent divides into two and afterwards unites, may choose to trace up their ancestry by different chains of succession—and it may happen that each compiler of the memoirs in question has given that list which came to his hand from family authority, without being personally committed to all its details. Upon comparing the two works, and finding a total want of agreement in a considerable portion of the genealogical chain, we should naturally conclude that the diversity may have arisen from some difference of principle observed in the mode of keeping a family register, and the last thing which would occur to us would be a mis-

giving as to the reliableness of the writers in matters fairly within the scope of their undertaking. Now, it is well known that the evangelists Matthew and Luke have given to us widely differing genealogical accounts of the ancestry of Jesus, and that Matthew divides his into three sets of generations, numbering fourteen each, whereas the individual names enumerated by him fall short of making up the total amount required. On this discrepancy and apparent blunder the critics are amazingly triumphant, and their comments have no doubt staggered many an honest mind. We will not dwell, in reply, upon the evidence furnished by this obvious and glaring diversity, that here, at least, there could have been no collusion. We will not stay to press the inquiry how it has come to pass that a church strongly suspected of "rounding off" the gospel narratives, never attempted a similar freedom for the purpose of harmonizing statements so obtrusively diverse. We will not urge the suggestion that if we could recover the principle on which each of these tables was framed, we might probably find that they are both reconcileable with historic fact. But we say that, taken at the very worst, this seeming discrepancy may be ascribed to the same class of infirmities in the writers, or, rather, of limited knowledge not essential to their purpose, as bad Greek, or incorrect philosophy. A perfectly correct list in detail of Christ's ancestry, is no part of the human life in which God is believed to have shown himself to men. There might be, and probably were, immediate reasons of some weight calling for the insertion, in each instance, of these documents in the evangelic narratives—reasons of a purely temporary and local interest; but to the world in general the precision of those lists, or of either of them, can be of no importance. Accept them, and no special advantage is gained—strike them off, and none is lost. Whether regarded as embellishments or flaws, they are rather attached to, than incorporated with, that body of facts in which God has made himself visible. They stand accounted for by the humanity of the writers, not the humanity of the mode of revelation. They may indicate a necessary finiteness in the recording instruments—but they involve the total sum of the matter recorded in no obscurity.



Mistake here, even if proved to be a mistake, no more affects the question of the writers' trustworthiness—their main object being considered—than a mistake in grammar, in logic, or in geography. We come to the conclusion, then, that a clear distinction should be drawn by fair criticism between statements of fact constituting "part and parcel" of that history in which, according to our view, a revelation of Deity is made to us, and those which, even if historically connected, are extraneous to the main purpose—and of the latter kind, we may reasonably content ourselves with receiving the current information of the times. We are not bound to regard such information as infallibly accurate, any more than we are under obligation to maintain that the idiom of the New Testament writers is pure. It suffices in the case of the information, as in that of the idiom, that no essential truth is affected by it, either one way or the other.

There is another distinction needing to be kept in mind, if we would examine these writings with critical justice—a distinction between what belongs to the manner of telling a story, and between what pertains to the story itself. In testifying to certain facts, a man may be received as a perfectly faithful witness, although in the course of doing so, he should unconsciously betray some habits of thought which may be deemed indefensible, or array his facts in a garb of theoretical opinions from which others may differ. The habits of thought and the theoretical opinions belong to *him*—the fact to which he testifies, to his reader. So far as concerns his capacity of biographer, it is enough that he gives you a faithful and speaking portraiture of his subject—and should he also, whilst so engaged, unwittingly reveal any part of himself, you will, of course, avoid the error of confounding the one with the other. Common sense dictates an observance of the distinction in any judgment we may form of ordinary history—and we cannot admit that in dealing with the gospels we are justified in putting our common-sense in abeyance. For example, it is alleged against the authority of the evangelists, but especially against Matthew, that they go out of their way to instance the fulfilment of some Old Testament prophecy, occasionally to



the extent of applying passages for this purpose which have no perceptible connexion with the fact, beyond a similarity in the sound of words. It is no part of our present plan to dispute the fairness with which these charges are made. We may, perhaps, be permitted to express, in passing, our doubt whether these writers, in asserting the fulfilment of ancient scripture, customarily meant by it the occurrence of the precise event at which the prediction was designed to point, or whether they intended merely to notice a striking coincidence between a modern fact and an old passage, or, as we, in modern times express it, the "making good" of such and such a saying by a new practical illustration. Waiving this doubt, and regarding the custom, whether peculiar to the apostles or common to the times, as open to all the severe remarks with which modern criticism has seen fit to handle it, we cannot forbear observing that it has nothing whatever to do with the reliableness of the writers for the facts they narrate. We are not to suppose that the evangelists were wholly free from the prevailing habits of their times—nor that whilst engaged in composing their respective gospels, those habits were necessarily suspended. If evidence can be found that they were given to exaggerate, and to colour their statements of fact for the purpose of shoring up their opinions, such evidence would be to the point, and damnatory to their high reputation. But in the case before us, it is not a fact of the history, but an opinion, or theoretic conviction of the writer of it, that is found fault with by the critics—and we must protest against impugning the authority of a divine revelation made through facts, on the ground of mental errors, if such they are esteemed, with which the historians of those facts may be supposed to have been chargeable—more especially as the last, which chiefly concern us, are in no way altered, perverted, or obscured by the first.

But there is yet a much larger sphere in which this distinction holds good—we mean, in that somewhat numerous class of miracles performed by our Lord upon persons possessed by demons. We trust we may be allowed, without prejudice to the argument, to declare our own faith in the fact of

demoniacal possession. We know, indeed, the contempt to which we expose ourselves among certain thinkers by this avowal, and we must be content to bear it as best we may. Perhaps, moreover, we have no right to complain, for although this tenet of our belief is justified to our own minds by strict philosophy, and may, perchance, if opportunity favour, be hereafter openly, and at fitting length, vindicated, it is neither necessary, nor suited, to our present object, nor does it consist with our present engagements, to trouble the reader with more than the bare result of much thought upon this question. But although our conviction is such as we have stated, we maintain that the opposite conviction is quite compatible with a reverential deference to the authority of revelation, and an unimpaired confidence in the testimony of the apostles. For, be it borne in mind, all the visible facts in these cases of possession are common to both parties—the difference being as to the invisible adjunct of the facts. Idiocy, lunacy, epilepsy, mania, are *real* evils, even if demoniacal possession is no better than a fancy—and when either of them is associated with organic impediments, such as deafness, or dumbness, or both, it is not usually held to be curable, at the mere bidding of man, any more than are other physical diseases. The tender compassion, the ready benevolence, and the divine power of Jesus Christ, were conspicuously and gloriously displayed in healing the unhappy victims of these physical ills, however impossible of access their weakened or overthrown intellects may have been to malignant spiritual natures, however conclusively it may be held that no such natures exist. It will be further admitted, we presume, that the witnesses of these alleged cures, even if utterly astray in their thoughts on possession, were not thereby incapacitated from describing, with faithful accuracy, the physical effects which were cognizable by their bodily senses. They nowhere tell us that they saw the demon leaving his victim—they nowhere in their narration of this class of miracles, so far as can be traced, depart from that strict adherence to truth which always characterises them when speaking of what passed under actual observation. Indeed, they so closely and conscientiously

describe symptoms of what they took to be the indwelling of a malignant spirit, that physicians of the present day are able to identify the cases with different diseased conditions to which the human frame is now liable. This would have been utterly impossible had any license been indulged in by the writers in recording tangible facts in each instance. Thus far, therefore, their testimony is credible, and, to this extent—no very limited one, we think—these recorded miracles may be received even by those who reject the theory of possession, as forming no mean portion of that entire body of biographical facts, mirroring to us, by Christ Jesus, the moral image of the Almighty.

But now, on the hypothesis that the theory of demoniacal possession is absurd, because philosophically untenable, in what respect is the testimony of the gospel witnesses depreciated? There can be no manner of doubt that they believed in the theory—as little room is there for denying that, in this respect, they were not peculiar in their faith, for their countrymen fully shared it with them. Say, it was one of the popular fallacies of the nation and the age. Be it so—then in recording, as we have seen, with scrupulous conscientiousness certain physical wonders effected by the Messiah, they also recorded them in terms which any historian of those times would have employed, and wrapped up the physical realities in an ontological covering, to which both themselves and their readers attached high importance. Rend that covering to pieces, and the realities are left untouched—because *these* constitute the *matter* of the story—*that* affects only the *manner* of telling it. As when one who believes that witches have power to agitate the elements, describes to you how, on one memorable night, they did their worst—hung the firmament with sulphurous clouds, rent the land with an earthquake, lashed the sea into fury, tore up trees by the roots, and swept the vale with an inundation—reason does not compel you because you disbelieve in witches, to reject the account of the terrors they are said to have occasioned, or of the mischiefs they are reported to have done. When the “midnight hags” have been eliminated from the story,



the tempest and its effects remain. The occurrences may have been as real as the manner of narrating them was imaginative—and, in the affairs of common life and history, no intelligent man feels that he is under the necessity of confounding the one with the other. So, in the case of the miracles of Christ on the bodies of persons alleged to have been possessed, it is a great mistake to suppose that by demolishing the theory of demoniacal possession, the entire class of events the record of which was penned in the conviction that the theory is true, is by that one stroke got rid of, and the supernatural acts ascribed to Jesus thereby greatly reduced in number. The substance of every story remains. The physical phenomena described are precisely what they were—neither modified nor destroyed. All that can be fairly said to have come to nought under the process of philosophic criticism, is the common belief of the age, which coloured the historian's manner—a belief which we may share or repudiate, without in either case affecting our faith in the trustworthiness of his testimony. Objections of a moral character may be started against the countenance given by the language and acts of Christ to what, on this hypothesis, was but a current superstition, which, of course, those who deny the reality of possession, but still accept the miracles, are bound to meet. That, however, is not our business. What we insist upon is this—that the facts narrated must be distinguished from the tenets of faith implied by the manner of the narrator—and that it verges upon a trick of sophistry to assume that by disproving the one you have thereby set aside the other. The reasoning which may tear to pieces the historian's supposed superstitious convictions, leaves his fidelity as a witness to things seen and heard wholly untouched, and, in the case under consideration, as we have already observed, corroborated by internal marks of scrupulous accuracy.

#### § 9. GENERAL EFFECT OF PRECEDING OBSERVATIONS.

We have already observed, and, we think, clearly shown that the New Testament is not a revelation of God in the strict sense of that term, but a record of one, vouchsafed in



the facts of a human life. Whether the Creator could appropriately disclose to us his moral character, relationship, and purpose, through one man's history, from birth to death, is an *à priori* question requiring to be decided by abstract intellectual and moral arguments. By similar means must we arrive at a conclusion, affirmative or negative, as to whether supernaturalism may fitly, and must needs, form part of any disclosure of the Deity made through such a medium. These two points having been disposed of according to their assumed merits, the further question remaining to be considered is mainly, if not exclusively, one of facts. Christianity is still operating upon the world as a spiritual power. It traces up its existence to the life of Jesus Christ, who professed to be, in a peculiar sense, the Son of God, "sent" to make known to men their "Father who is in heaven." Such a profession we are justified in regarding as an introduction to us, in the shape of external fact, of the speculative and abstract conclusion previously settled upon what appeared to be sufficiently solid grounds. We saw in our own nature certain religious capabilities, susceptibilities, and irrepressible yearnings—and we saw in a revelation of Deity through humanity a congruous objective provision for their exercise and satisfaction. That some man, therefore, should appear in our midst, claiming to be a representative of the Supreme, assumed to our reason, thus prepared, the appearance of a fact in accordance with just expectations. We proved that such a man, presenting himself to us on such a mission, could substantiate his claim no otherwise than by miracles, and that in such a service miracles are not only not at variance with, but are themselves a fitting exemplification of, the known principles of the Divine government. An immense body of historical facts, then, which no one can think of impugning, bears us back to Jesus Christ, who claims to have appeared amongst men for the realization of a purpose we have seen to be desirable, and who assumes to make good his claim by an appeal to proof we have seen to be fitting and necessary. Such being the case, the record, it is clear, must be treated as a record of facts likely, in the nature of things, to have happened at some period of

the world's experience, and certain, from the same cause, to happen but once. What, then, can we reasonably demand of the history, but that it should fairly abide the tests by which we examine all other history in relation to singular but not improbable occurrences? Now, we make bold to say, that the evidence adduced in support of the historical trustworthiness of the writers of the New Testament is as various, as weighty, as logically impregnable, as can be collected in favour of any history whatever. More than this, we contend, is not absolutely required—but more than this is forthcoming at demand. Sceptical writers, we are aware, ask further satisfaction on this and the other point at which the chain of demonstration is alleged to be interrupted, or barely visible. They dare not make similar and equivalent demands in any other instance. They would not so risk their reputation. They dare not condemn as fictitious whole passages, and, for that matter, entire works, of secular annalists or biographers, on those grounds of criticism upon which they so coolly immolate the gospels. The truth is, supernaturalism is, in their view of it, undeserving of civil treatment—beyond the pale of controversial responsibility—and requires to be put down by any and every weapon of hostility within the critic's reach. Adjudged beforehand, and by a dogmatic philosophy, to be a culprit, it is examined accordingly. Out-of-the-way proofs are demanded—solemn depositions are set aside—ordinary allowances are refused—the common rights of history are declared null and void—and when, by a free resort to these violent methods, the verdict on fact has been made to square with the *dictum* of philosophy, we are bidden to accept the result as a proof and an earnest of man's intellectual progress. Now, we protest against this as unreasonable. If supernaturalism in *theory* is to be extinguished, let it be done by sound theoretical reasoning—if supernaturalism in *fact* is to be crushed, let it be crushed by instruments applicable to matters of fact. But it is certainly too arbitrary first of all to bind it hand and foot with thongs of a self-settled philosophy, and then fling it into the water and bid it swim where nothing else historical could live. Try this record as you

try others—its statements of fact by the same ordeal as you usually adopt in reference to statements of fact—its principles of philosophy by considerations of philosophy—but let it not be taken for granted that a mere objection to its principles in the one case, can justify a departure in the other from the usual method of trying statements of fact. In a word, what reason requires of a record of revelation, in as far as it is narrative in its form, is, that it should stand upon a ground of evidence level, at least, with that of history received universally and without demur. We assert that the New Testament record stands much higher.

§ 10. WHAT OUR RELIGIOUS SENSE MAY REQUIRE OF A RECORD IN REGARD TO THE INTERPRETATION OF FACTS.

The course of argument we have pursued has led us step by step to the conclusion that in the life of Jesus Christ, as recorded by the evangelists, we have a display of the moral aspects of the Divine character and will, adapted to the wants of our religious nature. That embodiment of truth after which human hearts, in all times, have instinctively craved, which brings God within range of our moral sympathies, and invites a trusting and affectionate response, is now before us, certified as such by the authority of reason. "He that hath seen me," said the Messiah, "hath seen the Father." We have tested that declaration, and are convinced. The living book in which we are to read God's mind in relation to his creature, man, lies open to the inspection of our hearts, as the book of nature lies open to that of our eyes and intellects. What more do we want? What else is needed to complete the revelation as an agent of spiritual power? But one thing more—a key to its religious significance. God is in the glittering firmament—in the foundations of the earth—in the restless ocean—in the fleecy clouds—in the bright and blazing sun. He is in all things great, beautiful, and true, upon which our sight can rest. He is in the laws and processes of this material universe, and, look where we will, our souls may see him. Nevertheless, we feel that in raising up for us men whom he has endowed with strong powers of insight into the



true meaning of this most wonderful exhibition, he has kindly consulted the necessities of our position, if not the absolute requirements of our nature. The waking dream asks an interpreter—and we are glad to accept such intimations as may guide our minds to a right comprehension of the unveiled mystery, with humble thankfulness. God, too, is in the life of his Son—in his discourses and his miracles—in his labours and endurance—in his daily tasks, and in his nightly retreats—in his sublime patience, his unwearied benevolence, his touching tenderness—in his tears, his agony, his trial, his death—in his resurrection from the dead—in his ascension from the Mount of Olives. This entire history, so strange, yet so human, so unlike all other history, yet so consistent with our highest conceptions of religious fitness, is a vivid adumbration to our hearts of the Great Unseen. Every part of it is radiant of Him—exhibits his character in forms adapted to our vision—develops the gracious purposes of his will. But here, too, we stand in need of guidance and help to direct our religious sense to a correct apprehension, a spiritual appreciation of the display. Just as on gazing at a picture of Raphael's we should rejoice to have at hand a companion who had familiarized himself with the spirit of the great artist, and acquired an insight into his genius, to furnish us with such brief notices as might assist us to a comprehension of the profounder ideas expressed by the painting, for want of which it would lose very much of its intellectual meaning—so, with the memoirs of Christ before us, as the spiritual revelation of God to our religious sense, we require, in order to adequate instruction and profit, the promptings and intimations, the comments and outpourings, of some who, gifted with deep religious insight, and with hearts tempered to recognise, and catch, and commune with, the soul of truth that is in the representation, shall be qualified to point it out to our duller vision, and initiate us into the rudiments of this divine mystery. What poets are to the natural exhibition of God in his works, these men will be to the moral exhibition of God in his Son. That need which we have of genius in the one case, we have of spiritual intuition in the other. The discoveries of



the one, far beyond the ken of most minds, are yet cognisable by most for what they are as soon as displayed. The truths described by the other, beyond the glimpses of ordinary religious nature, are, nevertheless, welcomed as truths of God when once set forth. Not all men can boast the faculty of discerning the moods, ideas, moralities, and spirit of nature—it is God-given. Nor have all men power to read the high purport of revelation, and recognise, at a glance, the divine significance of its facts—it, too, is God-given. But all whose susceptibilities to higher than mere utilitarian impressions are not dormant for want of cultivation, or choked by undue developments in other directions, can understand and share the poet's secret when he is pleased to impart it—and all whose religious consciousness is not overshadowed or deadened, can hear and enjoy the harmonies of truth when its chords are touched by the hand of a spiritual prophet. The multitude of us need interpreters in every department of knowledge, abundant and rich as may be the materials within reach. What wonder, then, that in the highest science to which our powers can soar, we should require not only faultless illustrations, but also a general exposition of their main features, their intent, their mutual relationship, and their scientific value? Our want in this instance tallies with our want in all similar instances—and all analogy would lead us to anticipate a provision to meet and satisfy it.

In general terms, we may remark, that a reasonable faith requires in regard to what we may designate the interpretative portion of the record, that it shall be found, on examination, to stand to our religious consciousness in much the same position as the historical portion does to our intellectual judgment. The emotional rather than the logical element of our nature is here addressed, and by it chiefly the final verdict must be given. The religious character of the men whose writings we are asked to receive, and their relationship to Him whose system of truth they expound—the circumstances which prompted their effusions—the correspondence of the general views they maintain with the entire body of facts to which they relate—and finally, the congruity of their exposi-

tions of the purport of those facts with the instinctive spiritual wants of our own nature—may, and, we think, should, constitute ample proof to our religious sense that these writings have upon them the stamp of divinity, and may be confidently received, for all the purposes of spiritual life and sustenance, as the truth of God. To each of these particulars we shall devote a few rapid sentences—not, indeed, to prove that the record in this respect is satisfactory, but to indicate the nature and the general features of the proof required.

It will hardly be seriously disputed, we imagine, that moral and spiritual perceptions are very considerably affected by moral and spiritual character. It is surprising, indeed, that doubt should ever have been entertained on the subject. Surely, as are a man's affections, so will his perspicacity be in matters relating chiefly to the affections. In common life we all admit this—our very instincts compel us so to do. Take, for example, the subject of family institutions—the duties arising out of them—the special dangers to which they are exposed—the virtues they are capable of nourishing—the superiority of the enjoyments they yield—and the importance, even under the most pressing temptations, of preserving untainted, even in desire and thought, the purity of home. Who could listen, on such a theme, to the dispatiations, or the suggestions, of a known courtesan? Are there not, within this sphere, delicate truths which can only be discerned by pure hearts—sanctities, the secret beauties of which none but upright worshippers can look upon—influences which a mind inured to sensualism has lost its power to feel—hopes, fears, joys and sorrows, of which only a sensitive virtuousness can be cognizant—and powers over the lower currents of feeling which spotlessness of character and of reputation alone can wield? Goodness has the clearest eye for truth. Genius is but the intuition of fervor. Man is something better, whatever may be asserted to the contrary, than a calculating machine, and is being disciplined for a nobler end than a perpetual interchange of syllogisms. In the province of religion, more especially, we ask that guidance shall be vouchsafed to us by religious faculties fully awake, and that what is ministered to spiritual life

should be ministered *by* spiritual life. We can conceive of as possible a non-compliance with this demand. We can imagine the exposition of the religious significance of the gospel, more especially on the hypothesis that it is untrue, having been undertaken by men of indevout habits and careless lives—to whose minds the idea of God presented itself merely as a topic of intellectual speculation (a sort of far-off idea, in which they were not practically interested), whose strong affections were pledged to nearer, more visible, more immediately realisable objects—in whose character fear of fanaticism prevailed over every other fear, and confidence in their mental strength over every other confidence—clear, cold, unsympathizing, disputatious men, keenly enjoying the indulgence of athletic intellectual habits, but knowing but little of that more than mother's fondness with which tender consciences will cling to their faith—proper and able men to discourse to their fellows on the properties of matter, and of all that pertains to exact science, but neither poets in feeling, nor prophets in belief—qualified neither to interpret for the soul those sentences of Nature which better than others they might be able to spell out, nor to divine and set forth the spiritual meaning of facts which, even if compelled to admit, they saw but little reason to admire. Happily, we venture to judge, our religious sense is exposed to no such anomaly. Had it been so, could it, in reason, have been satisfied? But now, looking to the writers of the New Testament epistles, do we not find in their religious character every guarantee for the truthfulness of their spiritual insight, which character can be conceived to give? The life of Christ, the image of the Invisible, was the topic of which they were to show the momentous bearings. Well, it is assuring to know that their hearts were in their work. If ever men might be regarded as alive to his ideas and purposes, they might. They had given themselves to him in a spirit of unreserved devotion. They trusted in him with a cheerful and unfaltering faith. They adhered to him with “a love passing that of women.” That kingdom which he came to found, of which he was the head, which “is not of this world,” and which consisteth of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy



Ghost," was all in all to their minds. In allegiance to its Lord they were content to "suffer the loss of all things," rejoiced to be counted worthy of reproach, and uncomplainingly endured the bitterest persecutions which the ecclesiastical jealousy of the times could devise. In them the grand precepts of their Master found true exemplification. The very wonders he had performed were remembered chiefly for their spiritual purport. Though they had loved him after the flesh, they had learnt to love him so no more. Their hearts, freed from other cares, and purified from grosser affections, lay bare to the impressions which his life and history were shaped to produce. With him their thoughts, chastened into reverence, daily and hourly conversed—and as they communed with him in spirit, they became assimilated to him in goodness, in gentleness, in purity, in piety to God, in charity towards man. Now, here, we have some warrant for expecting a deep insight into the purport of his mission, the soul of his work. They possessed in perfection that best of interpretative faculties—sympathy with the Author whose volume of deeds and sufferings it was given them to explain. The glow of their own souls lighted them to the truth embodied in that marvellous story with which, in one way or another, they had become personally connected. Love caught the glance of love. Purity understood the language of purity. Spiritualism saw the lighter expressions of spiritualism. The men and the object of their study were attuned to each other, and divine harmony was likely to be the result.

But this natural guarantee for the truth of their spiritual insight is strengthened by another consideration. Most of them had been the companions of Jesus—all of them had a special commission from him to found his church—one of them, and he, certainly, not "the least of the apostles," either in breadth of view, or in intensity of devotion, professed to have received instruction directly and miraculously from the risen and glorified Christ—and all of them were, from time to time, owned in their apostolic work by "signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." Such was their duty, such their position, and such their powers, that we



cannot reconcile it with the principles of God's moral government, that they should have been permitted to interpret erringly the great principles of the newly-established kingdom to our religious sense. Their official relationship to its Head, the solemnity with which they had been set apart to their high functions, the unspeakable importance of laying the foundations of so grand a spiritual system in truth—these and many other considerations authorize us in concluding that these men would not be left, by the providence of God, to misconceive and misrepresent to coming ages the religious significance of that life by which God had revealed himself to men. Given, the manifestation of God by Christ, and the spiritual insight of his apostles into the meaning of his life, and of the characteristic features and laws of his kingdom, seems to us to be an inseparable sequence. But, at any rate, along with the religious character of these men, the relation in which, by his own appointment, they stood to himself on the one hand, and to the church on the other, disposes our reason to accept their exposition of the principles of his kingdom, as in strictest harmony with his own mind.

Further assurance on this head is produced by the circumstances under which their epistolary writings were called forth. In almost every instance, they exhibit the play of light upon existing incidents. They are not formal expositions—they are not systematized comments—they are not scientific developments of novel principles. They are more generally earnest and affectionate effusions of argument, of remonstrance, of caution, of exhortation, elicited by actual occurrences, which touched the responsibility of the writers. Those occurrences were various, although many of them were of a similar type—usually an attempt by others to ritualise the freedom of the gospel. There was, therefore, an immediate necessity for pointing out, with more or less fulness, the bearing of the revelation by Christ upon mistaken efforts to advance his cause. Now every one knows how much more advantageously we learn the nature of great principles of truth when allowed to see them in their practical bearing in given cases, than when exhibited to us in their abstract form. The doctrine to be

taught is illustrated by the error to be corrected. Much of Christ's own teaching was after this sort. Most of the lessons enunciated by the movements of Divine Providence are conformed to this pattern. And it contributes something to our confidence in apostolic teaching to find that it was rather drawn out of them by events calculated to awaken their religious anxiety for others, than volunteered to display their own acquaintance with the mysteries of the kingdom, or to indulge an unhealthy craving after personal exaltation. The motive in each case is as satisfactory to our religious sense as are the capabilities of the penman. Such capabilities we can confide in all the more securely when moved to exertion by such inducements. All is homogeneous. All appears to be the legitimate fruit of spiritual life. Everything is in keeping with the revelation to be interpreted. Nor can we omit to notice here the *tone* of the writers now under consideration. They uniformly speak in the accent of men conscious of imparting knowledge rather than of uttering opinions. Most modest in their personal claims, even when defending themselves against wanton assaults upon their official position, they utter none of the truths of the gospel "with 'bated breath, and whispering humbleness." They reason, they expatiate, they use persuasion, they appeal to facts—but they never hesitate in their statement of conclusions. In brief, theirs is certainly the manner of men entertaining no doubt, troubled by no shadow of a doubt, that they are speaking the mind of their Master. Whether they believed themselves inspired, in the modern understanding of the term, may admit of a question—but we think there can be none that they believed themselves to be giving a thoroughly trustworthy interpretation of the work and will of Christ.

There is another criterion by which our religious sense may test the reliableness of these writers' spiritual insight—namely, the correspondence of the general views they maintain with the entire body of facts to which they relate. One can easily imagine, aided by his knowledge of doctrines which have since obtained extensive authority, how possible it was for these New Testament epistolists to have propounded some crude

maxim or erroneous principle, which would have enveloped in impenetrable darkness one-half at least of the life of Christ—which would have rendered some of his discourses unintelligible—made much of his conduct meaningless, if not contradictory—and subjected the mind to all the unexpected balks, surprises, and disappointments, which usually attend all attempts to reach a conclusion by a mistaken clue. But if the apostolic epistles operate upon the mind in just the opposite direction—if, after patient study of them, one may read again the life of Christ as recorded by the evangelists, with increased satisfaction—if many expressions of his, heretofore hard to be understood, acquire a greater lucidity and fulness of meaning—if most of his actions become radiant with a new spiritual idea—if the history hangs together more connectedly as a whole, and the relation of part to part is more readily discernible—if the lights and shadows of the picture all assume to the eye an appropriate place and proportion—if some perplexities are cleared up, and some misapprehensions corrected, and some novel harmonies are brought out—and if we detect more clearly, underlying the whole extent of the facts, one consistent and beneficent purpose, giving colour, and warmth, and spiritual impressiveness to the entire history—then our religious consciousness may be fairly satisfied that it has been furnished with the right key to this treasury of divine knowledge. Now, we think there can be no serious difference on this head. Indeed, so obviously do the epistles shed light upon the gospels, and so unmistakeably do they bring out the significance of the facts, that the more common charge preferred by sceptics is, that the narrative has been invented, or, at the least, tampered with, in order to square with the theological system professedly based upon it. Having already decided that the evangelical memoirs of Christ are authentic, we need not stay to refute that charge. But the fact that it has been made suffices to establish the correspondence between the text of revelation—namely, the life of Jesus—and the spiritual exposition of it found in the epistolary books of the New Testament. It is not, however, our present purpose to prove the point. We are not engaged in furnishing evidences in



support of Christianity, which has been done to so large an extent by other hands. We rather wish to describe the *kind* of evidence which reason and our religious nature may accept with confidence. And, in pursuance of this design, we affirm that reliance upon the true spiritual insight of Christ's apostles into the divine significance of his life, may be confirmed by the discovery, that their interpretation of the leading principles of his kingdom, elicited by accidental mischiefs needing correction in the infant church, lends a fuller and a deeper meaning to the entire body of facts constituting the Saviour's history.

Lastly, assuming the facts to contain a divine revelation, that interpretation of their spiritual meaning which is found to be congruous with our religious consciousness may complete our conviction that we are rightly instructed in the mind of God. This congruity is, to a great extent, the ultimate basis of very much, if not most, of the actual belief existing in the Christian world. Theories of divine inspiration may be true or not—may be treated as the foundations upon which the authority of God's Word reposes, or as human inventions to secure integrity of doctrine—may be overrated on the one hand, and undervalued on the other—but after all, the steadiest, the surest, the most operative belief in Christianity, is that which is born of the conviction that it answers to our need. There are countless thousands of men who know nothing whatever, and are never likely to know anything, of the incessant controversies waged upon this delicate question, who, nevertheless, rely with unfaltering confidence upon the testimony of the witness within themselves that the gospel, as expounded by the apostles, is an elevating, purifying, gladdening, spiritualizing, power. They feel that it has succeeded in quickening in their bosoms a new and more glorious life—that it has set before them a nobler end of living—that it has brought them under the power of a better dominant motive—that it has infused into them a vigour for self-government such as they have derived from no other source—that it has hushed their consciences to peace—that it has changed the entire character of their views of God—that it has intertwined their strongest



affections with imperishable objects—that it has filled, even to overflowing, a sensible void in their being—that it has superinduced a willing resignation to all providential arrangements, however hard to bear—that it has overcome in them the fear of death, and endowed them with “a hope full of immortality.” With this experience in view, you might as well tell them that God made not the sun nor the eye that sees it, the earth nor the senses to which it ministers enjoyment, as to question with them whether the truths they have found so adapted to their spiritual wants are essentially divine. They wait for no settlement of theological conflicts touching the mode in which Scripture was given, to enable them to recognise the authority of revelation. Its title to reign over them is found in its power to do so. All the religious instincts of their nature determine for them the sufficiency of the New Testament display of God in Christ to answer their demands. And, in truth, the basis of their faith is trustworthy—more trustworthy, perhaps, than any theological dogma, how correct soever, respecting the inspiration of Scripture. The latter may be made the substratum of not a few erroneous convictions. The former seldom underlies any serious weight of error. Men are misled easily enough by sophistry, by assumption, by ecclesiastical authority—but seldom by the testimony of their religious consciousness that it has found a suitable object. “He that *doeth* the will of my Father, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or not.” Yes! practical experience is a safer instructor in this school than theoretic certainty. As touching theological science, it may often be wrong—but as touching religious truth, it is for the most part right.

Now we are fully aware that it is precisely on this very ground that many sceptics justify their rejection of Christianity. We discover, say they, no congruity between its doctrines and the instinctive yearnings and felt wants of our religious nature. On the contrary, the teachings of the New Testament are so decidedly repugnant to our better feelings that we cannot possibly accept them as a revelation of God. Well, this is an objection which it is impossible to answer

until it is more accurately defined. We require to know, in the first place, what are the doctrines referred to as doing violence to our religious sense. We must ascertain, in the second place, whether they are fairly to be understood as taught by the New Testament, or whether they belong only to the deductions of a speculative theology. We should find it necessary to learn, in the third place, whether it is the essence of the repudiated truths, or only the form of them, that is obnoxious to religious consciousness. And, in the last place, we should need to discover, if possible, whether the result which is attributed to the spiritual instincts may not more correctly be ascribed to their having been silenced by reasonings. It may be necessary for us to give an illustration. The following will perhaps explain our meaning. There is a class of sceptics who deny that there is any reality answering to the Scripture notion of *sin* towards God, and, consequently, of disapprobation and punishment of it by God. An alleged revelation which turns upon this point, is, in their view, a demonstrable absurdity. Now we are not going to argue the question itself. We will not stay to determine whether man stands in any moral relation whatever to his Maker—nor whether, if he does, any deliberate conduct of his unbecoming that arrangement is in harmony with the will of God, or with the principles on which he regulates his moral government—nor whether, if it is, the wilful departure from moral law is followed by any moral disadvantage in the experience of the offender—nor whether, if it is, that moral disadvantage is, or is not, *per se*, irremediable. These questions we leave where they are, as not falling within the scope of our present undertaking to settle. It is more to our purpose to remark that a negative exception cannot be held to disprove a positive rule. Because some men may be instanced who have argued themselves into an apparent disbelief of sin as a reality, we are no more obliged to confess that the doctrine of sin is at variance with religious consciousness, than we are to allow that bread is not an article of food suited to human stomachs, because in some morbid conditions of the body the stomach rejects it. The simple fact is, that one may as rationally hope to succeed

in convincing men in general that there is no such thing as natural law, as that there is no such thing as moral law—and that deviation from the one will not be visited by inconvenience, as that wilful infraction of the other will entail no moral penalty. When we talk of the religious instincts, we mean those which are common to the race—and we say again, that faith in those truths of revelation which are found to be congruous with them, rests upon a sufficiently broad and stable foundation.

The primary truth of the apostle Paul's teaching—that the promulgation of which he declares to be the end of his ministry, is, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," and the practical use he makes of it is, to "beseech men to become reconciled unto God." The primary doctrine of the apostle John is, that "God is love"—and that "he that loveth not knoweth not God." These two apostolic positions are resolvable into one, and they assuredly constitute the essential principle of Christianity. Say that these doctrines are rejected—it does not necessarily follow that their rejection results from their felt incongruity with the religious sense. There are not wanting other causes powerful enough in their operation to produce it. Indisposition to religious questions or exercises of any kind—mistrust of all conclusions which are not reached by a strictly logical process—misapprehension of the meaning or bearing of the proposition so announced—and, in some cases, violent prejudices engendered in early life by the uncouth forms in which the truth was presented—may step before the religious sense, and prevent it from delivering its own verdict. In this case, as in many similar cases relating to common matters of experience, we are justified in regarding a negation as of no sensible weight as it affects the issue before us, compared with a positive result. The congruity or incongruity of the truth with our spiritual nature will appear more conspicuously in the instances in which it is received—just as the compatibility of a certain kind of food with health and nutrition may be best ascertained from the experience which follows upon having eaten it. But it is surely matter of notoriety that the apostolic doctrines quoted



above have been very widely received through many generations, and that spiritual life has been largely sustained by them. We do not adduce the fact to prove that they must be therefore true—we do not allude to it with any view of showing that they are necessarily congruous with our religious instincts—but we do think that it should give pause to philosophic scepticism before it pronounces such dogmas irreconcilable with man's religious constitution, and therefore inadmissible as part of the revealed will of God. To make good any such assertion, it ought to be shown that the apostolic teaching tends to hinder the development of a sound religious character—begets emotions unworthy of our moral relationship to him—prevents the play of suitable affections—unfits the soul for purifying intercourse with the Deity—narrows the range of our charitable sympathies—or, in some other way, damages our spiritual powers and susceptibilities, which, in the absence of any such faith, would more freely and beneficially have expanded themselves. We are not called upon to say whether or not this can be shown—but, so far as we are yet informed, this has not been demonstrated.

Now, clearly foreseeing the probabilities that the position we have just advanced will be turned against our own conclusion by those whose unbelief is settled, we regard it, nevertheless, as tenable, and we feel convinced that it will yield a firm footing to that much larger class in pursuit of religious truth—namely, intelligent inquirers, who are simply desirous of basing their religious faith upon ground that their unbiassed judgment can calmly survey and pronounce to be both solid and sufficient. It is simply useless to reiterate in their hearing an assertion, true though it may be, that the writers of the New Testament were inspired by God; and that, therefore, their teachings must be received as infallible. There is, as it appears to us, a visible pathway to the same point, along which every step that is taken may be taken with the eyes of reason wide open, and which, having been traversed, there will remain no further impulse to retrace. God disclosing himself to man's moral sympathies in a human life crowded with moral action, is a necessity called for by the universally felt wants of our religious nature.



God marking off that life from human life in general, by supernatural displays of Almighty power, is a necessity called for by the character and end of the revelation we require. The history of Jesus Christ, with which is identified the grandest spiritual revolution which the world has witnessed, presents to us precisely those features which abstract reasoning concludes to be indispensable. All the tests which we are accustomed to apply for the purpose of ascertaining the trustworthiness of history, certify the honesty, the conscientiousness, and the competency of the evangelists—and if so, the Jesus whom they portray is the representative to us of the Unseen God—or, in his own words, “the way, the truth, and the life.” Of the spiritual purport of his life on earth, besides what we gather from his own lips, we have fuller information from the letters of men whom he appointed to found his spiritual kingdom, and whose mission he sanctioned by miraculous attestations. That they had a true insight into the significance of his career on earth, we have a right to anticipate from their appointment to the apostolic office, and from the high functions they were bidden to discharge. Everything in the character of the men tended to fit them for obtaining this insight—everything which occurred to elicit from them a display of it, commends their motives in availing themselves of the advantage. In the light of their epistles, the entire life of Jesus assumes a deeper and more spiritual meaning—and the system of religious truth resulting from the body of facts, as interpreted by the apostles, has exerted, and continues to exert, upon the minds of those who receive it reverently and affectionately, a purifying, ennobling, spiritualizing power. If, then, we may depend upon the history as true, we may also depend upon the interpretation put upon it as a correct exposition of the mind of God in the revelation he has made of himself through his Son. It suits the facts on the one hand—it meets the wants of our religious nature on the other. We need not discuss, in order to conviction, whether the evangelists or the writers of the epistles wrote under the influence of divine inspiration. That question, suitable enough in its place, is out of place here. In whichever way decided, the authority of divine revelation

remains. It resides in the facts justly interpreted by men whom we have reason to believe rightly comprehended their purport—and, in those who accept Christianity, it is confirmed by the experience they have of its religious power.

§ 11. RELIGIOUS INSIGHT NOT TO BE CONFOUNDED WITH INTELLECTUAL PROCESSES.

Having stated some of the reasons which have brought us to the conclusion that the writers of the epistolary portion of the New Testament were endowed with the power of insight necessary to a full and correct perception of the religious significance of the life of Christ, it will be expedient to consider the nature and extent of the dependence which may be placed upon it. If the foregoing observations are pertinent and just, reason will warrant our confiding implicitly in the spiritual intuition of the apostles, in regard to all matters which fall within the legitimate range of its functions. Their perception of the *divine* was as perfect as the need of man required that it should be—but it does not follow that the eye which saw God, was able to see all objects whatsoever with the same distinctness. Let us illustrate this by what is more within our reach. There is a quality of conduct which men term *honour*. There is also a sense by which that quality is discerned—in some individuals, highly cultivated—in others dormant, if not extinct. A series of transactions—say, a life—may be imagined, exhibiting that particular attribute of character in various phases, and bringing out, in concrete forms, a complete representation of the abstract idea. Here, then, we have a body of actions instinct with a certain spirit. Not every one would be equally gifted to perceive that spirit—to trace it in all its manifold workings—to comprehend its subtler movements—to pronounce infallible judgment on all its appearances. There would need, in order to this, a close correspondence between the objective manifestation and the subjective faculty or sense—a perfect adaptation of the latter to the former. But then, it is not less certain, that the most exquisite sensibility to all the modes in which the quality of honour may address itself to the mind may be associated with glaring intellectual

deficiencies. In whatever pertains to this single subject, there might be marvellous penetration, delicate discernment, keen and unerring discrimination, whilst, in other matters, there might be in the very same individual a propensity to blunder in the collection of facts, and a palpable ignorance of the plainest rules of logic. If in the attempt to convey to others his own nice perceptions of the subject he is so well qualified to expound, he should mistake a common fallacy for a truth, or get his reasoning into an inextricable tangle, no intelligent man would feel that his defects in this regard detracted a feather's weight from the authority of his judgment in all that touches questions of honour. Now, surely, it is reasonable to look at religious insight with similar discrimination. Its special and appropriate object is the *divine*. In the apostles, it was a clear intuition and intimate realization of God in Christ—a ready apprehension of the spirit and purport of that wondrous life—an unclouded view of its bearings upon the world's destiny—and an accurate interpretation of the language it addressed to man's religious nature. It matters nothing to our present purpose what may be the immediate cause to which we assign their power of insight—whether we believe it to have resulted from the direct action upon their minds of the Spirit of God, or from that intense fervour which stimulated into highest activity all the faculties, and warmed into extraordinary sensibility all the sympathies of their religious being. It still remains true that the one element which this peculiar gift qualified them to discern, to commune with, and to point out with infallible authority to others, was the mind and purpose of Deity in the person, acts, and sufferings of Jesus. Man's spiritual need craved just that knowledge which this insight fitted the apostles to impart—and craved no more. Here faith would be dependent—but in lower regions than this infallibility was not required. We are not entitled, then, to demand that with this spiritual intuition there shall be associated an entire exemption from deficiencies in every other respect. In showing the application of divine truths and principles, in meeting prejudices, in brushing aside misconceptions, and in bearing down erroneous conclusions, the apostles



would be under the same necessity as others of using their intellectual faculties, and of employing such methods of appeal from mind to mind as might, in their judgment, be intelligible and effective. Now, we contend that imperfection in the management of these intellectual processes does not reflect a shadow of discredit on the perfection of their religious insight—or, in other words, that men may be thoroughly competent to declare to their fellow men what there is of God's character, of God's intention, of God's will, in any special embodiment of them, without being necessarily beyond the reach of correction or criticism in any of the modes of communication they may deem it expedient to adopt. The stammering tongue does not destroy the worth of a kind message. The heart's love may be truly declared even in broken metaphors. The spirit of a law may be lucidly and impressively set forth, although, in doing it, a man may illustrate his point by a mistaken allusion, or an exploded fact. And the mind of the Highest may be unerringly interpreted for us by those whose figures of speech are occasionally confused, and whose chains of argument are not always logically conclusive. Thus much, we cannot but think, candid sceptics will feel themselves bound to admit. The distinction we have attempted to draw between religious insight and the intellectual processes necessary to give it utterance, is a real one. An instance or two in which it should be observed, will serve, perhaps, to prove that not a little hostile criticism of the apostolic writings, even where we are compelled to admit its justice, is quite irrelevant to the point in debate between those who believe and those who disbelieve in Christianity as a revelation.

We select two epistles, the canonical authority of which is disputed—the second epistle to Timothy, and the general epistle of Jude. We shall assume, for the purpose of the illustration, that both have been properly included in the New Testament. But both exhibit instances in which the writer adopts and incorporates with his own matter statements which were merely traditional, and which appear to have been gleaned from works of apocryphal authority. Paul gives to the Egyptian magicians who withstood Moses the names of



Jannes and Jambres. Jude alludes to a contention between Michael the archangel and Satan about the body of Moses, and quotes a prophecy said to have been uttered by Enoch, and actually found in a work bearing the patriarch's name. Now, let it be granted that, in each case, the apostles were in error—that they mistook for fact what had no better foundation than the invention of a romancist—and that they used certain fictions of the age, as if they were history. What follows? Is their religious insight proved to be at fault? Not at all. That faculty did not necessarily assist in determining questions which properly belong to simple intellectual criticism. If, in making these allusions, the writers had given an unbecoming view of God, an erroneous notion of his relationship to us, a questionable idea of our duty to him, or to each other, or any expression of sentiment whereby our *religious* consciousness might be misled, we should have had sufficient reason to distrust the reliableness of their spiritual intuition. But the divine gift which enabled Paul to see God's will in every form in which it was revealed, altered in no way his capabilities of determining whether the men who withstood Moses were or were not named Jannes and Jambres, nor affected his inclination to believe or disbelieve. It was a question lying quite out of the sphere of the religious sense, however preternaturally exalted—and a mistaken belief in regard to it was no more a proof that Paul was fallible in his expositions of the mind of God in the gospel, than if he had taken it for granted, on the authority of an ill-informed geographer, that Britain, instead of being an island, was a promontory of the continent of Europe. Similar reasoning will apply to the case of the apostle Jude—upon which, however, it would be superfluous to detain the reader. The allusions were no doubt selected for their aptitude to the strain of remark in which the writers were indulging—and if instances of the kind found in the genuine apostolic letters, instead of being, as they are, occasional and equivocal, had been far more numerous and decisive, they would have left the authority of these books, on all matters directly pertaining to man's religious nature, wholly untouched.

Precisely the same rule of discrimination is applicable for

separating the spiritual truth intended to be exhibited from the style of remark or reasoning employed to bring it home to conviction. The first is the proper object of religious insight—the last pertains to an intellectual process. That may be perfect where this is open to some question. For instance, in the epistle to the Galatians, Paul insists upon the dispensation of Christ as one of grace and freedom—and, amongst other observations, he writes, “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman—but he of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman, by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Now here, passing by unnoticed the incompleteness of the parallel started by the writer, and, in the eagerness of discussion, pursued only along one line of it, until the last stage is attained, we find the apostle Paul referring to some historic fact in the life of Abraham as an allegorical prefiguration of the spiritual truths he was then engaged in establishing. Suppose it could be shown that he availed himself of a method of interpreting Old Testament Scripture common to the school in which he had been educated—suppose that such a method could be proved to be more fanciful than sound—and suppose, further, that this particular exemplification of it could be fairly brought under condemnation on this account—that the alleged allegory existed only in Paul’s mind—and that the mention of it was attributable rather to an indefensible habit contracted at the feet of Gamaliel, than to the actual typical signification of the history referred to—suppose all this, which, however, is gratuitous supposition—our faith in the apostle’s religious insight may still remain unshaken. His method of argument, intelligible and forcible to those whom he addressed, as it was evidently so to himself, even if logically invalid, implied no misapprehension in respect of the great and vital spiritual truth he was occupied in presenting to the mind of his readers. On

the contrary, the strength with which that truth took possession of his soul, and the extent to which it filled it, would naturally predispose him to see analogies to it in events the most unlikely to other minds. To him, thus attuned, those events would sound in unison, and he would rightly use them for his purpose, in communicating his ideas to others' minds, whether they did or did not actually embody the meaning he attached to them. Allegory or no allegory, the doctrine imparted is the same. The machinery, so to speak, employed to display it cannot fairly be identified with the object it exhibits. The broad glimpses of revelation which Paul had enjoyed, he was moved by an imperative sense of duty to disclose to his fellow-men—and, assuredly, the clearness and steadiness of his religious insight may be fully relied on, without requiring from him, in his efforts to impart of its fruits to the world, that his usual habits of thought, argument, and expression, should be elevated for the occasion to a position of intellectual infallibility. The truth is not the less divine, because the method of announcing, illustrating, and enforcing it, is human.

There is yet one other and still wider field in which this discriminative process will be found applicable, in a general survey of which we are constrained to ask on both sides the utmost candour. We wish to point out a distinction between the essential spirit of a revealed doctrine, and the form in which it may have been presented to religious faith. Most intelligent and reflecting readers of the New Testament must have been struck with the fact that between the mode of displaying the characteristic truths of the gospel adopted by the apostle Paul, and that adhered to by the other sacred writers, there is a very perceptible difference. Not merely in phraseology, but in the cast of ideas, does Paul evince originality and uniqueness. So obvious is the fact, that several of the doctrines of Christianity are regarded by those who look no further than the surface, as exclusively Pauline—and it seems to be taken for granted that to him alone, under God, the world is indebted for those views of the scheme of salvation, the belief of which is absolutely necessary to genuine subjective religion. Indeed, it would appear, at first sight, as if to the disclosures of spiritual truth made by



our Lord during the period of his earthly ministry, and expanded by those of his apostles who commenced their work immediately upon his departure, Paul had supplied the complement—and that, until after he had written, the subject matter of divine revelation was still incomplete. If such were really the case, the martyr Stephen, when he commended his spirit to his risen Master, and besought forgiveness for his murderers, must have been ignorant of some of those vital truths which it was reserved for a young but active participant in his condemnation and execution, at a subsequent period, to announce to the world. For several years, too, the Christian Church, although never more devout, more energetic, more united, more self-denying, or more successful, than during that interval, must have been destitute of that complete knowledge of the way of salvation, which was afterwards supplied by the apostle of the Gentiles. The preaching of Peter, of James, and of John, would, on this hypothesis, be wanting in some essential truths until after the conversion of the apostle Paul. Nevertheless, in the epistles of the three, written long after what are designated the Pauline doctrines had been communicated to the Church, the train of thought and expression which runs through them does not assume the Pauline hue, nor vary in any respect from what we may suppose would have been natural and appropriate had they written them previously to Saul's journey to Damascus. If, now, startled by this result, we examine the matter more closely, we shall find that between these earlier apostles and Paul himself, there is no single essential idea, no portion of the subject-matter of revelation, in regard to which any real difference obtains. That which Paul taught, Peter and John had taught before him. The great truths by which he sought to awaken spiritual life in the hearts of men, were precisely the truths which had been wielded by his apostolic predecessors. The difference between them was not in *what* they promulgated, but only in the external form of promulgation. Paul's position was peculiar. He was *par excellence* the apostle of the Gentiles. It specially concerned him, in the discharge of the duties of his office, to secure for his converts an entire freedom from the ritual restraints, pro-



hibitions, and obligations of Judaism—and to detach religion from what had been preparatory, local, and temporary, in its objective embodiment. Zealously and wisely did he labour in his peculiar sphere. Sturdily, perseveringly, and in almost every place, was he opposed by Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but who failed to comprehend the nature and principles of his spiritual kingdom. This was the occasion of most of the Pauline epistles—and, accordingly, the doctrines of the gospel are presented, in most of this apostle's writings, in a form adapted to the emergency. *Law* was the fixed idea of the Judaizers in connexion with religion—its perpetuity, its claims, its rewards. It was this ever-recurring and dominant idea which Paul had to combat and overturn. He met it and overthrew it by showing the main principles of revealed truth in their aspect towards law. Hence, the forms in which he explains and enforces the spiritual significance of Christ's life and death are most of them borrowed from judicial administration. The whole scheme of mercy and grace by the Son of God assumes, in his thoughts, the shape of an extraordinary and glorious expedient to rescue from impending judgment a culprit adjudged to be guilty—and he argues that "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made" such as "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," "free from the law of sin and death." The divine truth underlying this representation is found in our Lord's teaching, and in that of the rest of the apostles—namely, the oneness of will between man and God is the result, not of our conformity to rules which he has prescribed, but of our acceptance of favour freely declared to us in the person and work of his own Son—or, in other words, that love to God is begotten in our souls by the love of God revealed in Christ. But the particular form in which the apostle Paul exhibited that truth is almost peculiar to himself—and was evidently well adapted to answer the end he had in view. Now we submit, that this peculiarity of form which certain doctrines assumed under the pen of the apostle, and which was not only justified, but recommended, by a peculiarity in his position, should not be treated as if it constituted a part of the reality and essence of evangelic truth. It is rather

a special mode of setting it forth. Had the circumstances of the early Church been entirely different, the same spiritual truth might have been exhibited under another external aspect, without in any degree altering or obscuring its general significance, its divine authority, or its regenerating power. It has become fashionable, of late, to draw a distinction between religion and theology. There ought to be none. But if it be a fact that there is, we think it may be thus accounted for—that religion sustains itself on the spirit of revealed truth, and that theology is rather based upon its scriptural modes and forms. God is necessarily in the one—not necessarily in the others. The last are valuable to men only as a way to the first. This is light—those are only the windows through which it streams into our souls.

#### 12. CONCLUDING SURVEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A RECORD OF REVELATION.

We may now gather up, into as concise a form as possible, the tenour of the observations we have ventured to throw out bearing upon the last branch of the subject under discussion. It has been our object to submit to the reader a connected chain of remarks intended to show that, notwithstanding the recent efforts of modern criticism, the New Testament may yet be confidently accepted as a worthy record of divine revelation. There is neither wit nor reason in the sarcasms which have been launched against Christianity on the ground that it has been enshrined for us, and for mankind generally, within the compass of a small book. The divine truths to which it directs the soul are in the character, acts, and sufferings of a representative life—a human life exemplifying, as far as human life can do, the moral phase of the Supreme Being. In such a history, and in its spiritual meaning, men may best contemplate those features of God's character, will, and glory, which are fitted to awaken their religious emotions, and implant in their hearts, and bring to maturity, governing religious principles. It matters little in relation to this result whether we look upon this appropriate and affecting display of the Almighty in the events themselves by which it was originally

made, or in a faithful and expository record of those events—their spiritual purport and power is the same; or if there be a preponderance of advantage secured by either method, it is found in connexion with that to which the necessity of the case has subjected our own times. A revelation in a record is, perhaps, all things considered, the most suitable form in which we could receive it. The New Testament, therefore, is none the less worthy of our study, in order that we may “acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace,” because it offers an inestimable boon to our souls in the shape of a book. But have we reason to believe that it answers to its high profession? Is it a record upon which faith may securely rest? We reply, Yes, if the substance of its history, and the correctness of its interpretation of it, remain unimpeached. Modern criticism has assailed both—and how, then, may reason be satisfied? We say, in relation to its statement of facts, by precisely the same kind and rules of evidence as intelligent men require for their satisfaction in any other matter of history. Will the evangelical biographies stand the tests which our reason deems amply sufficient to prove the authenticity of contemporary secular histories? Take, for instance, the description by Josephus of the siege of Jerusalem under Titus—what are the proofs deemed necessary to convince us that it is a narrative of facts, and not a fiction? Turn to the gospels. Apply the same rules, observe the same distinctions, make the same allowances, in the one case as in the other. In what respect does the credit of Josephus stand on higher ground than that of the New Testament historians? True! *they* narrate a series of miracles—*he* records natural occurrences. But if, in connexion with any human-life manifestation of God, miracles are necessary, advantageous, and in keeping with the known principles of divine proceeding, as we have attempted to show, then a series of miracles accompanying such a life is an antecedent probability—and the writer who records them stands on the same ground for the judgment of criticism, as the writer who, portraying no such life, details for our instruction and amusement events within the ordinary course of nature. Well! let criticism show in



what respects the secular narrative rests upon a more solid ground of proof than the sacred. We listen to no prejudice on the one hand—we ask no favour on the other. Our reason concludes that proof sufficient is before it in support of the substantial fidelity and accuracy of Josephus—Our reason demands at least equal proof in support of the integrity, competency, and conscientiousness of the evangelists. Is equal proof within reach? We ask the most sceptical of critics. Can it be pretended, setting aside the supernaturalism of the gospels, the credibility of which must be determined on philosophical and abstract grounds, that the basis on which our faith in their historical truthfulness rests, is not as broad and deep as any upon which we build our knowledge of the past?—is not much broader and deeper? In this respect, then, the record is all that we require of it. We receive it on rational evidence, as a written daguerreotype of divinely significant facts. Divinely significant—for, surely, if the facts be true, the mind of God is embodied in them. This is their own pretension, and this pretension they sustain by exhibiting to us the credentials of Almighty power. Well! can our reason be satisfied that the mind of God, as developed in these facts, has been rightly apprehended, and is truly expressed in the record? What are the grounds upon which an affirmative decision of this question may fairly rest? They comprise the following propositions:—That He who announced himself as sent into the world to declare the will of his Father, selected and expressly appointed certain individuals to preach that will, as expressed in his own life and death, attested their mission by miraculous signs, and gave them immediate and marvellous success—that, if intense pious fervour, exclusive cultivation of their own spiritual life, and an entire surrender of their whole being to exercises, acts, and endurances, calculated to elevate, refine, and mature religious consciousness, do anything to assist man in discerning and comprehending godly revelations, the lives of the apostles show them to have been eminently qualified to discharge the duties of their high office—that such of their writings as “the Record” contains, display them as occupied in precisely that practical work which occasion



renders indispensable ; correcting mistakes, further illustrating imperfectly understood truths, pointing out their bearings upon human duty, shaping them into earnest appeals to men's religious sympathies, urging them with a view to "temperance, righteousness, and godliness," and doing all this in a tone of personal modesty united with unhesitating official authority—that the letters they addressed to the churches, under such circumstances and for such ends disclose great spiritual truths, in the light of which the entire life of their Master, as narrated by the evangelists, assumes a consistency of purpose, a unity of meaning and moral, and a self-interpretative power, not otherwise so distinctly perceptible nor so strikingly appreciable—and that these grand characteristic truths, which they thus elicited from the facts, and which are sustained, illustrated, and vivified by them, are so far in accordance with our religious nature, with its felt wants, its incessant cravings, its capacities, susceptibilities and tendencies, in regard to things divine, as to have become, in the experience of those who have sympathizingly received them, a source of spiritual life, peace, purity, and power, such as can nowhere else be discovered. These general positions having been substantiated, we conclude, with the fullest sanction of our reason, that this record of a divine revelation fulfils all the demands which can be properly required of it—faithfully preserves for us the history of that life in which Deity was imaged to humanity—fittingly and satisfactorily guides us to its spiritual import. Criticism can only destroy the New Testament by killing it in these two vital points. It must be shown, by such tests as sensible men feel bound to apply to *all* history, secular as well as sacred, that the evangelical biographies are unsustained by adequate evidence—and it must be proved that, even if the facts are true, the meaning attributed to them by the apostles is palpably gratuitous and mistaken. But until this has been done, critics labour in vain to subvert this record, as a basis of rational belief, whatever may be their success in demonstrating that the historical portion of it is characterised by the seeming imperfections which attach universally to the most authentic historical works, or in

proving that, in setting forth the divine significance of the facts, the writers exhibit those limitations of intellectual practice and power from which it is difficult to conceive how any human penmen could be free, but which do not necessarily impart the slightest uncertainty to a single spiritual doctrine they have undertaken to disclose to us. Taking the New Testament as a whole, we are not disposed to deny that it bears upon the face of it many indications that its several writers were not entirely exempt from mental imperfection—but we contend that the imperfection which their works exhibit is perfectly compatible with the communication to men of infallible knowledge respecting God, his moral relations to us, his purposes with regard to us, and the religious duties which these things enforce on all who would attain unto eternal life. And if this be true, the record, equally with the revelation, satisfies the spiritual need of man in its fullest extent.

#### § 13. RELATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW.

Regarding the main design of this work as now completed, we are yet unwilling to close our labours without briefly adverting to the claims of the Old Testament upon our faith, and the relation in which it stands to the New. Possibly it may be felt by some that could they but disjoin the one from the other, retain the later dispensation, and cast aside the earlier, the ground of their faith would be firmer and more secure. Be this as it may, the task is not feasible. So manifestly did Christianity grow out of Judaism, so intimately and inseparably is the one blended with the other, so evident is it that the first looks back upon the last, and the last looks forward to the first, and so explicitly, frequently, and solemnly did Jesus and his apostles appeal to Moses and the prophets in corroboration of their own teaching, that no scope remains for the conclusion that the one may be only human, while the other is divine. They stand or fall together. Their connexion is as that of the stem and the flower—of infancy and manhood. They are different stages of the same revelation. They have a common root. It is vain, therefore, we think,

and childish, to conceal from ourselves, or attempt to conceal from others, the fact that objections subversive of the divine authority of the Old Testament, are also subversive of that of the New. But it is also fair and reasonable to insist that the light of the New Testament should be allowed to assist us in our judgment of the Old—and that the latter should not be examined apart, as if its merits were all included in itself, but should be candidly treated as preparatory to the former—rough beginnings of what was subsequently completed—rudiments not yet perfectly developed—first steps in the ascent of humanity, under divine guidance, to those exalted spiritual truths and principles which, we hope, will one day sway the hearts of the whole family of man.

We look upon the education of the human race as a process quite distinct from, but perfectly analogous to, the education of individuals. Mankind, as such, has a life of its own, in which its several powers are developed in due order—the sensual, the intellectual, the moral and spiritual. There is a common, as well as a personal, experience—and generation hands to generation the result of its thought, efforts, struggles, defeats, and victories. The errors that formerly lived and flourished, being once rooted out, are killed for all future time—and if there be broad belts of humanity's surface on which they still linger, the clearance which has been effected on either side of them, renders the work of extirpation so much the more easy than it was before. Truths which are now communicable to the rudest, because backed by the authority of the more enlightened, were, at one time, when devoid of this advantage, not communicable to any. By very slow degrees has the superiority of moral over physical power become established—but being established by that experience towards which age after age has contributed, many and potent are the influences now available for the government of society, which, in days gone-by, no genius could have evoked. England governs the whole continent of India, at the present day, with a scant physical power which, at no former period in the history of the world, would have sufficed to awe into subjection a hundred millions of men. Is this phenomenon ac-



counted for by our strategetical science, by the discipline of our troops, by the rapidity and certainty of our previous conquests? Not wholly—not, perhaps, mainly.—It is not the deadly physical power which we can bring into the field, but the skill that organized it, the knowledge that directs it, the intellectual grasp that can apply it as emergencies arise, which awe the Oriental swarms into submission. That moral repute which these things give us in their eye renders easy what but a few ages ago would have been impossible—the quiet rule of a dense population, by no means socially content or happy, by a military, in the proportion of less than one man to a thousand. There are multitudes of things feasible enough now, which have become feasible only because the race has advanced—and each acquisition, intellectual and moral, renders all future ones more easy and more certain. The materials which constitute at any given moment the general stock of man's knowledge, and the average tone of his sensibilities, determine the amount and character of what can be successfully added—and the electric spark of sympathy which will kindle a whole generation into flaming enthusiasm, liberated before its time, would simply flash and disappear without taking effect. Many were the men who preached the doctrines of the Reformation before the birth of Luther—men as able, as zealous, as courageous as he—but who preached with comparatively small results. The vast difference between his success and theirs, is attributable, not to his superiority, as an instrument, over them, but to the higher state of preparedness in which he found European society. No grand epoch in this world's history can be dissociated from what has preceded it. For all great changes there has been a long previous course of suitable training. The destiny of man, under Divine Providence, is evermore forward—and hence, the adaptation of the means employed to educate him, must be judged of by their correspondence with the stage of human development at which they were employed.

The person and life of Jesus Christ, judged of by his own declarations, are emphatically *the* revelation of God to man, suited, as we have endeavoured to show, to the special wants



of our religious nature, and attested by that kind of evidence which could alone establish its divine authority. But if this be true, it may be asked, what becomes of the Mosaic economy, which also pretends to be a revelation of the Supreme? If man really requires a manifestation of God through the medium of a human life and history, in order to an appreciation of the moral perfections, and a sympathy with the moral designs, of the Most High, what need of a dispensation extending over some two thousand years, which presents no such alleged aptitude to our nature and our position? If Christianity be what we have contended for, what is Judaism? We reply in brief, the Old Testament economy, *ipso dicente*, is a showing of God by means of a theocratic government of a special people—by the laws, social, political, and ecclesiastical, under which they were placed—by the providential events which governed and shaped their national life—and by the prophetic communications which interpreted those events, and which, from time to time, directed the hopes of the people to that more glorious future, of which their own history was but a budding germ. The revelation by Christ *could* not be made, with any permanently beneficial result, until those ideas had been elicited, and those religious sensibilities awakened, to which it makes its spiritual appeal. When the Jews came out of Egypt, they were plainly a barbarous and ferocious people—pagan in all their sympathies and habits—rude, savage, and sensual in their tastes. They were a fair specimen of human nature in its animal type—and as such it was necessary to deal with them. Man needed to be taught, in some one branch or other of the family, that God is one, and that the earth is his and the fulness thereof—that relationship to him implies obligations the fulfilment of which ensures a blessing, the violation of which entails a penalty—that He who made the heavens and the earth is carrying on a moral government—and that the position of men in relation to that government is a matter of vast importance to themselves. Sense of right and wrong *in regard to Him* had to be quickened and exercised—the distinction between purity and impurity had to be educed—some notion of divine law had to be im-

pressed and gradually deepened—and, in a word, all those elementary religious sentiments which are necessary to a perception and realization of spiritual grace, freedom, and loveliness, had to be born and nurtured. Let it be borne in mind that the experience of any one member of the race, when published and authenticated, becomes part of the experience of the race itself. It is not necessary that every individual should pass through all the training which in some shape will ultimately conduce to the formation of his mind and character—because much of it will have been borne for him by persons who have preceded him in his earthly career. The power of moral agency is elaborated by numberless separate processes—and the victory which one man achieves, yields its fruits to all other men who witness or who hear of it. In like manner, the discipline of the Jewish people was not for themselves only, but for the whole family of mankind. What they needed in order to religious development, the whole race needed—what they attained, the whole race may have the benefit of. Had Jesus Christ appeared in the days of Moses his mission would have been futile, for his message could not have been understood. The ideas, convictions, and susceptibilities which Judaism had contributed to the common stock of humanity, had also put humanity into a position which rendered it capable of receiving a divine revelation in this more perfect form. Nay, more! we question whether if all the records of the Mosaic economy, and all the notices of Jewish experience, could be swept into oblivion, it would be possible for us, even in the present day, to comprehend the spiritual significance of Christianity. At any rate, we have not the smallest doubt that now, and in all coming ages, the religious power of Christianity is, and will be, immensely increased, by the opportunities which the Old Testament affords men of watching the preliminary and preparatory, and step-by-step manifestations of the Deity, through his government of the Jewish people. We have the rough sketch alongside of the finished picture; we have all the progressive stages between the first stroke of the one, and the last touch of the other. And although the former has been superseded by the

latter, it is puerile to despise it as having no further use. So do not men of average intelligence in any other department of valuable knowledge—so ought they not in this. Far from regretting that we are compelled to accept the Old Testament with the New, we rejoice in it—just as we should esteem a work of scientific completeness all the more valuable for being accompanied by the series of progressive discoveries, which terminate in the satisfactory and perfect result.

Doubtless, the mind enlightened, and the conscience educated, by the higher truths and principles of the gospel, will detect, as did the apostle Paul, much that is inferior, uncouth, and cumbersome, in the ancient dispensation—representations of Deity that jar upon our more refined sentiments—passages of history that strike us as monstrous—deeds and systems sanctioned which we unequivocally condemn—motives appealed to which we regard as low and trivial. And this will be the case, just in proportion as we go back to extreme antiquity. Well! but could it have been otherwise? Is it not just what we should anticipate in the education of man's nature, from the lowest stages of animalism up to the highest development of spirituality? Is it a fact that the moral training of our race differs so far from that which is physical, as that the faculties are able to take in at once the highest forms of pleasure which can be proposed to them? Is it not wise and beneficent to impart truth as men are best able to receive and assimilate it? What father does not act upon this plan? How silly are the ideas which he gravely presents to the mind of his child—silly, we mean, if compared with the absolute truth of things, instead of being judged of, as they ought, by their accordance with a childish capacity. How many communications, untrue in form, but true in the impression which they make, is he compelled to resort to! How inferior the motives which he is obliged to invoke! How minute, and, sometimes, inexplicable, the regulations his most sagacious affection deems it expedient to lay down and enforce! Does the child, when he arrives at man's estate, recall these efforts to lay in him the foundation of an upright character, and implant in his heart the seeds of right principles, for the purpose of heaping ridicule upon them, or



of complaining that during his boyhood, he was not dealt with as a reasonable and independent man? Very near akin to this, however, is the style in which modern philosophical criticism deals with the Judaical economy. The Jehovah of Moses is indignantly rejected as jealous, irascible, cruel, sanguinary—as governing by fear—as sanctioning crime—as punishing and rewarding, not in accordance with the immutable principles of wrong and right, but according to arbitrary standards devoid of any moral worth. And, truly, all this indignation seems highly virtuous if you measure the patriarchal and Mosaic representations of God, by the purer, nobler, lovelier views of the Divine nature and character which Christianity has diffused through society—but if you contemplate them in their adaptation to the people whom they were meant to influence and educate, disapprobation appears to be mistimed and superfluous. The question is, could the early Israelites have received more than was imparted to them, or could they have appreciated it if presented in higher forms? Must it not be conceded, looking to the record whence these objections are derived, that the little light of that spiritual dawn, blood-red, if the sceptic pleases so to designate it, became stronger and purer as the nation could bear it? that in the time of David, it was brighter and steadier than in the time of Moses? more genial and fuller still in the time of Isaiah? Is it not true that nobler sentiments were gradually, although not without many relapses, formed among this people? Is it not undeniable that their later prophets encouraged wider and worthier views of God and man? And must we not, in candour, admit that, whilst other nations left the Jews infinitely behind them in intellectual culture and civilization, the world is nevertheless indebted to this singular people for all its present ideas of the moral beauty and spirituality of the Divine character? Supposing it to be true that the Old Testament comprises a varied record of a preparatory revelation, what do the facts and main features of the case, as therein set forth, exhibit to a believer in the present day? Why this—light from above finding its way to the mind of man environed with a dense atmosphere of animalism, and necessarily assuming colours which belong, not to itself, but



to the medium through which it must needs pass—the wisdom of God, the purity of God, the beneficence of God, the one Ruler and Father of mankind, taking to themselves such forms in the providential guidance and government of a nation marked off, from all others, as might penetrate, awaken, and exercise conscience in respect of Himself, where such conscience, deeply imbedded in sensualism, ignorance, and superstition, could not be otherwise got at. Somehow, or other, it is certain, spiritualism, starting at the very lowest conceivable point among this people, made steady progress—cleared itself gradually of the grosser forms with which it was first associated—and ultimately brought up the level of human kind to an average of religious conviction and sentiment which rendered possible the presentation of divine truth, by Jesus Christ, in the most spiritual form which our nature can apprehend, realize, and enjoy.

To adaptation and progress we may add another characteristic of the Old Testament manifestations of the Supreme—namely, unity. The several books of which the record consists—history, poetry, prophecy—were written by various hands, at different times, separated from each other in many instances by intervals of centuries, and on occasions, and for special purposes, extremely dissimilar. Now we do not mean to affirm that a critic, in these days of philosophical sunshine, forgetting to allow a hair's breadth of consideration for the variations of mode and method in the conveyance of spiritual truth required to adapt it to a nation in its several stages of religious development, cannot, by minute investigation, detect semblances, at least, of occasional discrepancy. But we put it with some confidence, even to the most captious, whether the general bearing of this entire collection of books is not in one and the same direction—whether they are not threaded together by an obvious unity of purpose, and whether a serious and continuous perusal of them does not leave upon the mind an intelligible, definite, and self-consistent impression. Is it not possible to pursue a leading idea from Genesis to Malachi, and would not any observant and reflecting man rise up from a study of the whole, with a strongly excited expectation that something still

better was to come—something towards which his attention has been repeatedly directed—something to the success and glory of which all that he had been reading was, by its own account, preparatory?

Standing, then, upon the broad, firm, and, as it appears to us, easily tenable grounds we have thus briefly sketched out, we see nothing in the tenour of the Old Testament inconsistent with the claims of the New. We feel ourselves bound in reason to deny the entire series of facts recorded in both—which we cannot do save by a process which would destroy all history—or, admitting the substantial accuracy of the facts, to regard them as embodying a progressive revelation of God, terminating, when “the fulness of time was come,” in the vouchsafement to human nature of a perfect “Image of the Invisible.” On a general survey of the entire case, we cannot discover in it any prominent feature irreconcilable with the principles of our philosophy. We are, indeed, very far from pretending either ignorance of, or insensibility to, some perplexities which we cannot disentangle, some difficulties which we cannot satisfactorily surmount. They lie, however, chiefly on the surface of things, and are calculated to puzzle far more than to disturb our faith. But if, yielding to momentary doubts, we were to surrender our belief, we should gain no satisfaction to our reason—since the perplexities, the difficulties, the large assumptions, the incompatibilities, with which we must be content to reconcile ourselves on adopting the conclusion that the Bible as it stands is the result of hallucination or of fraud, are a hundredfold more numerous, and inexpressibly more revolting to our common sense, our moral instincts, and our religious sympathies, than any to which that belief now exposes us.

#### § 14. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE FOREGOING BASES OF BELIEF.

The intellectual scepticism of the present day appears to us to be distinguished by two elements—it is partly speculative and partly critical. No doubt, it has allotted work to do of which Christianity will hereafter reap the benefit. Neither do

we question that it has taken deep hold of many sincere, conscientious, and highly cultivated minds, which command our respect for the freedom and fearlessness of their inquiries after truth, although none for the decision at which they have arrived. In truth, we demur to the appropriateness of the title which they too often arrogate to themselves, of *rationalists*—meaning thereby men who depend for their religious convictions upon the authority of reason. That is not reason, in our sober estimate, which sets aside an immense body of facts either by a speculative dogma, or by the utmost ingenuity of criticism. The highest interests of a man rest, surely, upon more tangible and solid grounds than can be undermined by subtle intellectual theories, or frittered away by acute and learned criticism. The strong common sense of mankind is usually more to be relied on than the most plausible ingenuities of abstract thinkers, save where abstract thought cheerfully accepts as its basis existing facts. Now, what is the alternative offered to our reason in the present controversy? We will suppose intellectual scepticism to have been successful—to have disproved the possibility of miracles—to have demolished the pretensions of a special revelation—and to have torn to shreds the Scriptures which profess to have recorded one. Well! but when that has been done to the fullest satisfaction of reason, there will still remain upon its hands some untoward facts to be got rid of. It will then appear that, from age to age, human ingenuity contributed, but without concert, forged materials to a common stock, and that each successive contribution was accepted by the nation to whom it was presented, as divinely authorised. It will appear that upwards of eighteen hundred years ago there existed a people exhibiting all the characteristics fairly ascribable to causes such as those which their fictitious history pretended to describe—speaking a language, cherishing traditions, displaying a national idiosyncrasy, bound to a ritualism, filled with expectations, just such as we might have anticipated had the sacred books they watched over with so much jealousy been truth instead of romance. It will appear that when the old delusion might well be supposed to be near its end, ready to be overrun by the



more rational and civilized notions of Rome, a new pretender sprung up to give a new turn to superstition—but that disappointing by the spirituality of his views the political wishes of the people, he was speedily put to death as a malefactor and blasphemer. It will appear that some few followers of his got up a still more egregious forgery than any of the preceding ones, but still grafted upon them—that, either, all unconsciously to themselves, they wove a tissue of falsehood which they managed themselves to believe, and to palm upon the belief of others—or that, purposely and with marvellous craft, they invented a tale which they afterwards laboured hard to promulgate, and died to verify. And it will appear that out of this concatenation of successive frauds, sprang the grandest, the most powerful, the most permanent, and, even at this very day, the most promising spiritual revolution of which the world has been witness—a delineation of the most original and perfect human character which imagination can conceive—an exhibition of the purest, most elevated, and most spiritualizing views of God to which man has ever yet attained—a morality which, if universally exemplified, would make earth a paradise—and principles of heroism which have subsequently produced the chief specimens of virtue, courage, love, and endurance to which humanity still looks up with admiring reverence. Is it not perplexing to our reason, is it not absolutely staggering, that out of this mass of falsehood should have come this truthful result? Do we see anything resembling it elsewhere? Do known analogies throw light upon it? Does common experience confirm it? Nay, is it credible on any of the ordinary grounds of belief? Nevertheless, this is the alternative which modern scepticism terms *rational*. Altogether, the case presents an amount of intellectual and moral difficulty with which our reason essays in vain to grapple. Disbelievers in Christianity, we should find ourselves involved in a thicker and more impenetrable mystery than any which now envelopes us, and should be compelled to accept more unaccountable conclusions, and on infinitely slenderer evidence, than any in which we now rejoice. But this we are certainly not prompted to by our reason. And if our philosophy had brought us to this pass,



or our critical sagacity had placed us in this dilemma, we should be strongly tempted to suspect that we might be wrong in our philosophy—we should begin to question whether our criticism was sagacious, more especially if, after having rejected the Scripture narratives, we should find ourselves obliged to throw away all other histories with them.

But, in closing this treatise, we hope we may venture to submit that neither undisputed facts, nor recognised principles of philosophy, nor sober and trustworthy criticism, impose upon us any such hard alternative as we have just described. The religious movement which originated at the death of Jesus, the principal phenomena of which tinge all subsequent history, and the power of which is far from spent even to this day, is certainly most satisfactorily accounted for on the hypothesis that the impulse was from God. Its rapid spread in the very teeth of Jewish prejudice and Roman pride—the entire possession it gained over the minds of its earliest adherents, and the unanimous zeal and fidelity with which they were content to “die daily” in the labour of extending it, and, at last, to die literally in attestation of their faith—the extent to which it has softened the ruggedness of human nature, and quickened a kindlier and more genial civilization than Egypt, or Greece, or Rome, ever displayed in their palmyest days—the amount and quality of spiritual life it has been the means of begetting and sustaining—the fact that it has invariably secured the largest triumphs where intellect is best developed and most practical, and at epochs when mind has been most awake—the power which it still successfully exerts in reforming character, in stimulating high motives, and in ministering the purest of pleasures, and the most effectual of consolations—and the strong probabilities in favour of its eventually realizing its own pretensions, and becoming the one faith of the human family—these things constitute a moral phenomenon without parallel in the world’s history, and go far, very far, to sustain the conclusion that, as it is evidently an important feature in God’s providential designs, so it represents, as it purports to do, his character and will. So potent a spiritual force, unless traced up to a divine origin, remains an inexplicable mystery—the

grandest of effects disconnected from all probable cause. Admit a revelation, and everything falls into its proper place—deny it, and the most important body of facts with which history makes us acquainted is thrown out of gear—cut off from every assignable likelihood to account for it, from every conceivable end to be accomplished by it. Here, then, we think, is one solid basis of reasonable faith in Christianity—what it unquestionably has done, is doing, and promises to do. Taking in the whole at one view, no consistent explanation of it can be suggested, but that it comes from God. This is its own report of itself—and, assuredly, a wide induction of relevant facts gives countenance to the truth of that report. Collected and generalized, they yield us but one conclusion—and if, on other grounds, we are compelled to reject that as inadmissible, they become to us instantly devoid of meaning. Need we say that those other grounds ought to be strong indeed, to justify our reason in deciding against so many concurrent favouring appearances? And if no such grounds of justification can be pointed out to us nor made good, are we not acting a rational part in accepting, in relation to the undisputed facts of Christianity, as we do in relation to those of the physical universe, the theory, suggested by themselves, which best tallies with and explains them? Thus far, it is plain, we apply to a religious inquiry the same rule as we take for our guidance in any other. If any departure is made from the path of sound philosophy, it is not by us who believe, but by those who commit themselves to doubt.

And why should we not accept the most natural explanation of these facts as the true one? What strain is thereby put upon our reason? What violence is done to our customary intellectual processes and habits? If we ask Christianity what it professes to be, it replies unequivocally, a showing of God to men by Jesus Christ. Supposing any such special revelation to have been superfluous so far as concerns the natural attributes of the Deity, can as much be truly said in respect of his moral perfections, relations, and purposes? *Some* exhibition of Himself all analogy would lead us to expect. He has endowed us with a religious nature. He has given us capabilities

of becoming acquainted with him—moral sympathies, and spiritual yearnings and affections which can find full satisfaction only in a complete oneness of will with himself. For this subjective aptitude we reasonably look for an appropriate objective provision. Certain it is that we find it not in ourselves, nor, judging from the general principles which appear to regulate the Divine method of proceeding, should we anticipate the discovery of it there. Neither can we meet with it in the physical universe. Much, no doubt, of God, is displayed in the mechanism and processes of Nature—but not specially adapted to awaken moral emotions, or supply a sufficient resting-place to moral desires. Matter and motion, however variously modified, can but ill be made to express spiritual sentiments, and uniform experience has proved that they never have succeeded in quickening amongst men a religious life. Now, if God has undeniably revealed himself by means of matter and motion so far as the need of our intellect requires, is not the inference warranted that if more suitable means can be found for a similar disclosure of himself to our religious sense, which is chiefly emotional, his wisdom and his goodness will employ them? May we not fairly expect, in this as in all other cases, a close correspondence and congruity between the end to be accomplished, and the agency made use of to achieve it? If God has shown himself through a material, why not through a mental and moral medium, especially when the object to be gained is wholly of the latter character? A man's life is surely as fitting a mirror for the reflection to man's heart of God's moral image, as physical mechanism—and far more suited to answer the requisite end. The class of ideas and sentiments with which our religious nature qualifies us to converse, and out of which alone it can draw nutriment and satisfaction, are best displayed in their action and exercise—and the incidents, the relationships, the duties, the deeds, and the sufferings of a man, "in all points like as we are," constitute a far likelier and more congruous embodiment of the moral character and purpose of God, at least with a view to the religious education of man, than any other that we can conceive of. And such seems to have been the general sense of mankind, often, it is



true, uncouthly and inarticulately expressed, but always with sufficient distinctness to intimate, that if the Supreme could, consistently with his own wisdom, disclose himself through a human medium of expression, an ever-active craving of our religious nature would be thereby met. Now this is precisely what the revelation by Jesus Christ purports to be and to do—to quicken in men's hearts a spiritual life by bringing them into contact with "God manifest in the flesh." The subjective want and the objective reality exactly correspond. And this congruity between what is within us, and that which addresses itself to us from without, is another solid basis of our faith. It is in accordance with a law which we observe to pervade the entire universe—for wherever we meet with natural capabilities and wants, we may be sure of discovering also a suitable provision for them. Upon this principle of the divine economy we think we are fully entitled to rely—and seeing it strikingly exemplified in the mission and life of Jesus Christ, we feel ourselves authorized by reason to conclude that a strong *prima facie* case in favour of Christianity, as a revelation of God, has been established.

A worthy end presupposes sufficient means, at least in all God's doings. If it is fitting that he should show himself to our religious consciousness in a human life, it is also fitting that he should visibly stamp that life with incontestable proof of his purpose. Such a manifestation could be of no practical advantage to men, unless there were legible on it some such inscription as this—"Truly this is the Son of God." Well, then, we require, in order to such a display of the Creator as will best suit the spiritual powers and sensibilities with which he has endowed us, some distinctive mark certifying to our reason that the human representation set before us can be a representation of none other than the Deity himself. But by what mark could we identify a portraiture of this sort? Wisdom will not answer the purpose, for there is no clear line of distinction separating the wisdom of God from the wisdom of man. Nor righteousness, nor justice, nor even goodness—for besides that the more perfectly they are exemplified the higher must be our moral taste to appreciate them, it would be im-



practicable to pronounce concerning any of them, when found embodied in a man's history, how far they were human, and how far divine. Foreknowledge, expressed by prophecy, would constitute a seal of Deity—but yet requiring more time, labour, and skill, to verify, than would consist with the ordinary circumstances of a busy world like this. It would be an authentication of such a revelation as we need—but standing alone, its practical use would be insufficient for the emergency. Only supernatural power could so mark off an individual human life from life in general, as to warrant our regarding it as an undoubted expression of God's mind, character, and will. Miracles would do it—and assist besides, in several ways, to render the manifestation morally impressive. They offer a species of evidence readily appreciable by the dullest—they fall in with universal expectation in connexion with a special disclosure of God's will to mankind—they address themselves to our sense of the marvellous which would seem to have no worthy object to respond to but the supernatural—and they serve to awaken men from a state of spiritual listlessness and indifference. A seal is wanted which none can mistake—miracles furnish that seal. Why, then, must we object to them, *in limine*? Do they imply anything at variance with the general principles of God's administration, physical and moral? On the contrary, closely examined, they are found to be in harmony with both. They answer a similar tuitional end, but of a special and a higher kind, as that for the attainment of which the uniformity of Nature's laws was originally established—they neither counteract nor weaken our reliance upon that uniformity—and they do but exemplify what we see prevalent throughout the Divine dominions—the physical mode subservient to the moral—the secondary subordinated to the supreme. Are they, then, as contradicting universal experience, incapable of proof by testimony? Not so, as facts abundantly prove. Far more incredible, because wanting any assignable purpose, would be the fallibility of human testimony in relation to a fact like the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, when corroborated by such various and abundant proof as that which is supplied by the foregoing and succeeding context of that fact. Here,

again, we find a third sure basis of belief. Christianity proffers us just that kind of attestation in support of its pretensions, which such a revelation imperatively demands, and which, assuming it to be divine, we are warranted in expecting that God would supply. What preliminary intellectual objection is there to prevent our acceptance of this evidence? It is necessary, it is pertinent, it is sufficient, it is morally impressive, it is in perfect keeping with the general principles of the Divine government, and, where supported by trustworthy testimony, it is capable of inspiring intelligent and confident belief. Why, then, are we to throw it aside, as if unworthy of further examination? What should induce us to regard that individual human life which claims to represent to us the unseen God, as the fiction of impostors or fanatics, merely because it is segregated from other lives by a supernaturalism which alone could stamp it as divine? Abstractly, and in theory, we contend, no authoritative or sufficient reason has been shown. Scepticism, in regard to Christianity, therefore, up to this point, although it may be intellectual, is not entitled to be designated rational. Belief keeps closest to the stated order of things.

Lastly, a revelation like this, presenting the only satisfactory solution of the various and abundant phenomena of spiritual power with which we are familiar, alone adapted to meet the wants of our religious nature, and authenticated by the only kind of proof which the peculiar nature of the case requires, must needs be historical, and be enshrined in a written record. Does this necessity destroy its practical worth? On the contrary, it enhances it. It renders it easy of access and of diffusion. It preserves all that is spiritually impressive in it, whilst it divests it of that exciting glare with which passing events of a supernatural character are apt to dazzle the imagination, and to divert from its legitimate functions the religious sense. Such a record Christianity proffers us in the New Testament. Can we trust it? What qualities should it exhibit to secure our trust? How shall we be reasonably assured that its statements of facts are to be relied on? How are we assured in the case of other historical statements? Test the narratives as you do all others. Weigh the character of the writers. Mark what

credit was given to them in their own age. Inquire what were the objections, the denials, the attempted refutations, ventured upon by their then enemies. Ascertain, if possible, their opportunities of verifying the facts which they narrate. Compare their biographies one with another, or, do as Paley has done, compare the history of apostolic life with incidental notices in apostolic writings. But do not subject these memorials to a kind of inquisition which no history on earth could survive. Distinguish, as reason teaches you to do in all similar investigations, between the substance and main purport of the statement made, and the unessential incidents with which it may chance to be associated—between the matter-of-fact honesty of the writers, and their speculative misapprehensions—between the facts which they record, and the nationality of manner with which they record them. In short, deal with them as you would deal with any witnesses whose characters are beyond suspicion. Is not all this rational, sober, usual? Why should we, then, go out of the way to destroy the credit of this record? And if fair criticism leaves the bulk of this history unimpeached, have we not a right to anticipate some sure insight into its spiritual significance? It is furnished us by men whose lives and whose office warrant our trusting in this respect—and whose writings, judged of by our religious consciousness, impart an additional luminousness to the life of our Lord, and develop spiritual truths which the experience of millions who have lovingly received them, has declared to be productive of the most elevating, purifying, invigorating, consoling, spiritualizing results. This is our last basis of faith. The record of the revelation makes its appeal to the ordinary tribunal, and to customary methods of investigation, in support of its statement of facts, and to the judgment of our religious sense, in support of its interpretation of them. Here, again, those who believe follow the usual order of things—those who doubt, resort to exceptional methods. Tried by the common sense of mankind, the New Testament record, carrying with it also the Old, maintains all the authority which such a record needs.

We have done. Our object has been to remove preliminary

objections of a strictly intellectual character, cherished by many against Christianity as a revelation of God. Modern scepticism, it has been said, must be met on grounds more strictly philosophical than those taken up by former apologists for the Bible. On those grounds we have met it. We have laid the entire stress of our argument upon facts which nobody can dispute, and on philosophical principles which few will venture to deny. If we have failed, it must be in our reading of those facts or in the application of those principles to the case in hand—and, doubtless, our failure will soon be exposed. But if we have succeeded, then the controversy is brought back to where it stood before modern scepticism changed the issue. The old evidences which, in days gone by, men of intelligence and judgment accepted as pertinent and triumphant, are neither irrelevant nor destitute of force. Not to supersede them, but to restore them to their just authority, have our labours been directed. We have sought, not so much to supply proof, as to point out the kind of proof admissible, and to be regarded as reasonable and satisfactory, in the settlement of this grave question. We have essayed to establish the philosophy which should rule the disputants on both sides. We trust we have done so with becoming moderation of temper—as we certainly have with scrupulous conscientiousness of spirit. Possibly, others will follow out, with higher ability than any to which we can pretend, the track of reasoning we have here essayed to indicate. At all events, we have passed rapidly along it with assured and increasing faith at every step—and, albeit there are some thoughts we have met with in the works of sceptical writers which have modified views we had previously entertained—for which we are not ashamed to tender them our thanks—we are bound to confess, and we rejoice in the confession, that we can calmly smile at the most confident assaults of intellectual scepticism, so long as we feel beneath us, firm, sure, and immovable, what we presume to designate **BASES OF BELIEF.**







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